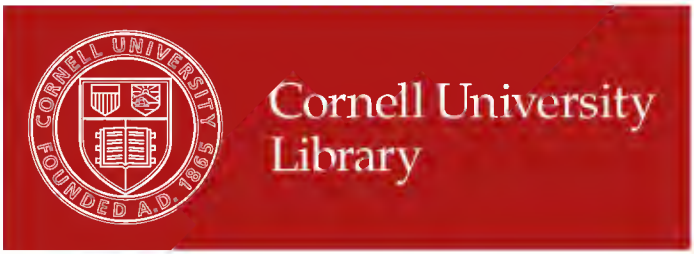

Fame and Fiction

By the same Author

A Man from the North

Journalism for Women

Polite Farces

Fame and Fiction

An Enquiry into Certain Popularities

By

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9 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden

1901

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Except the first and the final chapters, the substance of this book was printed at intervals during the last three years in the columns of The Academy, *to whose Editor I am indebted for courteous permission to republish.*

The "Average Reader" and The Recipe for Popularity

I

The "Average Reader" and The Recipe for Popularity

Not only is art a factor in life; it is a factor in all lives. The division of the world into two classes, one of which has a monopoly of what is called "artistic feeling," is arbitrary and false. Everyone is an artist, more or less; that is to say, there is no person quite without that faculty of poetising, which by seeing beauty creates beauty, and which, when it is sufficiently powerful and articulate, constitutes the musical composer, the architect, the imaginative writer, the sculptor and the painter. To the persistent ignoring of this obvious truth is due much misunderstanding and some bitterness. The fault lies originally with the minority, the more artistic, which has imposed an artificial distinction upon the majority, the less artistic. The majority, having accepted the distinction, naturally takes care to find in it a source of pride, and the result is two camps which

vituperate and scorn each other: the minority despises the majority for being "inartistic," and the resentful majority accuses the minority of arrogance and affectation.

In the field of fiction—the art with which this book is concerned, and which, perhaps, most closely touches the world at large—the two camps seldom communicate save in terms of sarcasm. Certainly they make no attempt towards understanding one another. That the majority could understand the minority is perhaps impossible; but the minority might and should understand the majority, and not until it begins to do so will the best forms of art begin to take hold of the race. Now the appearance of an extremely popular novel, which, used with pacific intelligence, might form a basis of mutual comprehension, is invariably turned into a fresh *casus belli*. The champions of the minority fall on the book with all arms of satiric analysis and contempt; the champions of the majority defend it with what skill they can muster, making up in brute force what they lack in adroitness. The minority says curtly, "This is not art"; the majority answers, "Never mind, it is what we like. Besides, it *is* art. Who are you that

you should define art? Anyhow it is popular." The minority sneers; the majority retorts a single word, "Envy." The breach is widened. Why should these things occur? Why should not the minority abandon the rôle of the superior person, and reason together—if not with the enemy? To admire the less admirable in art is not a crime, nor the fruit of a mischievous intention to overthrow the august verdict of the centuries: nor is it a mere vagary. If 50,000 people buy a novel whose shortcomings render it tenth-rate, we may be sure that they have not conspired to do so, and also that their apparently strange unanimity is not due to chance. There must be another explanation of the phenomenon, and when this explanation is discovered some real progress will have been made towards that democratisation of art which it is surely the duty of the minority to undertake, and to undertake in a religious spirit. The missionary does not make converts by a process of jeers; he minimises the difference between himself and the heathen, assumes a brotherhood, and sympathetically leads forward from one point of view to another; and in order thus to lead forward he finds out what the first point of view is. I am aware that a few of the

minority regard the democratisation of art as both undesirable and impossible, but even they will admit that this particular problem in the "psychology of crowds"—the secret of popularity in an art—has sufficient intrinsic interest to be attacked for its own sake, apart from any end which the solving might or might not serve.

My chief aim in most of the following chapters is to explain to the minority why the majority likes or dislikes certain modern novelists. In approaching matters so inflammatory to the wicked passions of the artistic, my aim has been to keep a friendly attitude, to avoid spleen, heat, and, above all, arrogance. I came neither to scoff nor to patronise, but to comprehend. I am conscious that there have been moments—especially when dealing with fashionable, as distinguished from popular, authors—at which, despite the most honest endeavour, I somewhat fell away from this counsel of perfection; but such occasional lapses were perhaps inevitable. In every case of a popular author firmly established I have found qualities which demand respect, and which few except those who are wholly preoccupied with the dandyism of technique could fail to admire. That these qualities are sometimes rather moral than

artistic was to be expected. Within the last fifty years there have been many attempts to delimit a frontier between art and morals, but none has yet succeeded; and it may perhaps be said that in the wide kingdom of popularity the two provinces of art and morals overlap each other more confusingly than in the narrower domain where reason has refined the crude operations of instinct.

The subjects whom I have chosen group themselves under five heads: "Classics of a period," like Mr J. M. Barrie, Miss Braddon, and Charlotte M. Yonge; fashionable novelists of the moment, like Miss Marie Corelli and Miss Ellen Thorneycroft Fowler; *very* popular writers, like Mr Silas Hocking and the magazine-furnishers; American writers who have been responsible for what amounts to a national craze, like the authors of *The Choir Invisible*, *David Harum*, and *Richard Carvel*; and lastly a small nondescript class of the non-popular or misunderstood—Ivan Turgenev, Mr George Gissing, and Mr George Moore. I included Turgenev in my list partly because the recent issue of a complete translation of his works renders him now, for the first time, properly accessible to English readers, and

partly because the enthusiasm of Eastern Europe and the apathy of Western Europe in his regard, constitute together a problem of popularity very wide in its scope, and of a curious fascination. The case of Mr George Moore stands quite by itself. Mr Moore is indeed a singular and solitary figure in modern literature. In his best books he has never swerved from an artistic ideal positively distasteful to the English temperament, and yet his best books have had a large and steady sale. The majority have read him without in the least comprehending his aims; the minority have decidedly given him less than his due. His reputation has, in fact, always been somewhat under a cloud. Believing him to be one of the most sincere and one of the most distinguished novelists of the latter half of the nineteenth century, I have thought it more useful to make a general explanatory survey of his methods and his work than to offer any precise conclusions as to the causes of his strange position.

If it be charged against me that certain renowned or notorious names are missing from this book, I have to answer that I was compelled to select, and that I selected those cases which seemed to be the most interesting. The

vogue of some writers, and the neglect of some others, call for no explanation.

Although it is a very long time now since I began my researches into the true nature of what is called "the popular taste in fiction," and although I have pursued the inquiry not only in the pages of books and the houses of the uncritical, but also in the *sancta* of publishers and all the marts where fiction is appraised and bought and sold, I cannot assert that I have arrived at any definition of that taste, either by inclusion or exclusion. The great public is so various, and its predilections so subtly and mysteriously instinctive—so personal and intimate, that it may not be said to have a secret; it has a thousand secrets, all interwoven, and none to be fully interpreted till the last of all is found. If, however, balancing one variety of the uncultured against another, we assume the existence of an "average reader," certain good qualities and defects may be positively attributed to this individual's literary taste. The catalogue is far from a complete one, more than probably it omits the items most essential to a full definition, but such as it is I will give it.

The average reader is unaffected. He has

no pose. In social converse he may—though even this is rare—faintly assent to propositions which he feels to be untrue; but he will never carry dissimulation so far as to read, still less to buy, any novel that he dislikes or thinks he would dislike. *Qua* reader and buyer he is honest as the day. Literature in his eyes is too trivial an affair to be worthy of serious and sustained lying. In this particular he differs from many members of the minority who have a passion and a true though limited taste for books.

The average reader is an intelligent and reasonable being. He is neither an idiot nor perverse. The attitude of the literary superior person usually implies that the literary proletariat patronises what it ought to ignore and ignores what it ought to patronise, out of sheer irrational contumacy. This is not so. The average reader (like Goethe and Ste Beuve) has his worse and his better self, and there are times when he will yield to the former; but on the whole his impulses are good. In every writer who earns his respect and enduring love there is some central righteousness, which is capable of being traced and explained, and at which it is impossible to sneer. I do not say that the average reader likes a bad novel purely for

the goodness in it, but I do say that he is never hoodwinked for long by an unredeemed fraud.

The average reader likes an imposing plot, heroical characters, and fine actions. Grandeur of subject will always be his first demand. This is of course notorious. A fact less notorious is that this preference of the average reader's is a classic preference, that all the finest art conforms to it, and that during the last fifty years it has exercised a valuable corrective influence against the theories of the brilliant decadents who have flourished (and in some ways have done so much for the novel) since Balzac died and the grand manner died with him. There can be no doubt that in putting subject before treatment, the majority has held to the straight path at a point where the minority has shown an inclination to wander. "The individual writer," says Matthew Arnold in the masterly essay on certain principles of art prefixed to the 1853 edition of his *Poems*, "may certainly learn of the ancients . . . three things which it is vitally important for him to know:—the all-importance of the choice of a subject; the necessity of accurate construction; and the subordinate character of expression." And again: "It is a pity that power should be wasted; and that the poet should be compelled

to impart interest and force to his subject, instead of receiving them from it, and thereby doubling his impressiveness." Thus Matthew Arnold reinforcing the subscriber to Mudie's! And here it may be remarked that the grandeur of subject which Matthew Arnold and the average reader insist upon can be only a moral grandeur. Events have no significance except by virtue of the ideas from which they spring; the clash of events is the clash of ideas, and out of this clash the moral lesson inevitably emerges, whether we ask for it or no. Hence every great book is a great moral book, and there is a true and fine sense in which the average reader is justified in regarding art as the handmaid of morality.

The average reader appreciates sincerity and painstaking. He admires these qualities for themselves, apart from results. No novelist, however ingenious, who does not write what he feels, and what, by its careful finish, approximately pleases himself, can continue to satisfy the average reader. He may hang for years precariously on the skirts of popularity, but in the end he will fall; he will be found out.

Coming to the defects of our reader's taste, the first and worst is that he has no sense of beauty—that is, the beauty of form. He ignores

it, not only in imaginative literature, but in every art, and in life. The most atrocious ugliness does not annoy him, and he has a blind spot in his eye for beauty. Perhaps the utter collapse of architecture, the most influential of all the arts, has something to do with this condition of things; perhaps it is only an effect. But whatever the cause, the result is desolating for fiction. It means that style is degraded, and that the supreme function of art, that of creatively interpreting beauty, is rendered null and inefficacious. Another limitation, scarcely less serious, is the inability to retire from an art-work and perceive it as a whole. Our reader's attention is always diverted from the main contour by trivial accessories. If the accessories amuse or impress him, then all is well; if the accessories are not striking, that is to say, if he is not titillated with reasonable frequency, then nothing is well. Make him laugh or cry, or shudder or think, sufficiently often, and you need trouble about nothing else. Omit to attend to these matters, and you may have written the *Antigone*, but it will not be read. "What distinguishes the artist from the mere amateur," says Goethe, "is *Architectonicé* in the highest sense: that power of execution, which creates, forms and consti-

tutes; not the profoundness of single thoughts, not the richness of imagery, not the abundance of illustration." Behold a primal truth which the average reader has not even guessed at—that there is a whole beauty, surpassing the beauty of parts. From his lack of perception arises the prosperity of the amateur novelist, with her following of fifty thousand souls; and to the same source may be traced that extravagance of mere illustrative decoration which mars all popular English fiction, making it ungainly, unsightly and vulgar.

Further, the average reader has some of the instincts of the untutored savage. To employ the terminology of other arts, he likes glaring tints; he prefers the chromograph to the oil painting. Drums and trumpets will please his ear better than any orchestra of strings. He wants crudity, and he does not want fine shades. Unless he is knocked down, or blinded, or deafened, he does not consider that he has been impressed. And in particular he desires and will have crudity of sentiment. For him sentiment cannot be too gross, too cloying in its sweetness, too sickly in its pathos. All popular writers are highly sentimental, even those who most industriously pretend to be otherwise.

The "Average Reader"

Nothing has contributed more surely to the vogue of Mr Rudyard Kipling among the majority than his constant abuse and falsification of sentiment.

Lastly, the average reader does not care to have the basic ideas of his existence disturbed. He may be emotionally aroused, but mentally he must be soothed, lulled, drugged. He is capable of a personal *animus* against the novelist who with too much suddenness invites him to readjust his scheme of things. A book of revolutionary ideas sometimes succeeds enormously, but it is a success of scandal. If you wish to tell the average reader that the earth is round, you must begin by hinting that it has occurred to you that perhaps there is the slightest conceivable curvature in the flatness of it; but no violence, no haste, no directness! On the other hand, though he resents a shock, he does not resent dulness. I am convinced that the average reader is seldom bored except by what is beyond his comprehension. In order to be bored, one must be sufficiently alert to know when one is bored; but the average reader is too somnolent to be self-analytic. From the relatively exciting portions of a book he acquires a momentum of interest which will

carry him without fatigue through illimitable expanses of dulness. This strange phenomenon explains why some of the most prodigiously dull novels ever penned have achieved a firm and honourable popularity.

There is a theory that the great public can appreciate a great novel, that the highest modern expression of literary art need not appeal in vain to the average reader. And I believe this to be true—provided that such a novel is written with intent, and with a full knowledge of the peculiar conditions to be satisfied; I believe that a novel could be written which would unite in a mild ecstasy of praise the two extremes—the most inclusive majority and the most exclusive minority. To capture the latter, the author of this novel must have first-rate imaginative power, in consideration of which the minority will, rightly, condone every fault. The majority is indifferent to sheer power, not desirous, indeed not capable, of being deeply stirred. The author's principal care must be, while ministering to the higher, not to offend the lower, instincts of the average reader. Thus he should choose a grandiose subject, rooting the whole story in one superb moral idea; but his treatment must not be too austere; he must employ that profoundness of

single thoughts, that richness of imagery, and that abundance of illustration, which Goethe said were *not* the distinguishing mark of the artist, but which Goethe did not say the artist might not use. This overlaid decoration, however, must not be too uniformly brilliant, lest the average reader grow weary in the continual effort to grasp it; there must be intervals—spaces of plainness. With regard to subject, a religious or quasi-religious subject is to be preferred, because it will make the widest appeal. In the popular mind *Robert Elsmere* and *The Sorrows of Satan* are the most striking novels of the last decade. The subject must afford abundant natural opportunities for sentiment of the simplest, lucidest, least subtle kind, and this sentiment must be produced by the machinery of physical event. The average reader has not yet perceived that a soul may have its history apart from the body; he can only see the one in the other, and if you offer him the one without the other, he will be mystified, and therefore aggrieved. It is not quite essential that the dominant interest of the novel should be a love-interest; I have shown in the chapter on Magazine Fiction that the great fiction-consuming public does not always

demand its dish of Love; but a dominant love-interest would be advisable, because any taint of eccentricity is to be avoided, and because nothing can compare with a love-interest as a continual fount of sentiment. As to the plot, its march must not be too rapid or too thrilling; a headlong gallop, or any excess of sensationalism, is very likely to estrange the average reader. It should move obviously and leisurely, amid various and contrasted scenes, and of these scenes a proportion should be arranged to display the luxury of wealth and the most elaborate forms of social ritual. The principal characters must be devised to catch both the sympathy and the admiration of the reader, and for this purpose they should have exceptional nobility; they must not be ordinary people, astoundingly revealed by art in an extraordinary light; that is not enough; they must be heroes and heroines. The tale must end happily—not because the reader cannot bear to be agonised—he likes to be mildly agonised, just before the climax—but because only by a happy ending can virtue meet with what the average man considers to be its deserts. The profoundest belief of the average man is that virtue ought never to be its own reward.

Shake that belief and you commit the cardinal sin; you disturb his mental quietude. The "tone" of the book should be serious and even staid, but not pessimistic; pessimism connotes lack of faith; it also saddens. "Is not life sad enough already?" This protesting query, so often heard, means that our novel must not embrace the whole of life; and indeed it must not. The novelist who gives too bold a prominence to that side of things which is not "the bright side" will never write our novel. Concerning style, the average reader will tolerate the highest excellence, provided that it involves him in no fatigue; he does not care to have to translate a fine style into what he calls plain English. Therefore the style must be neither subtle nor complicated nor of an original technique. Similarly, the mental and moral attitude of the historian must conform, broadly, to current ideas. There must be nothing in it really subversive of that vast fabric of prejudices and misconceptions which the worthy reader would call his philosophy. As for humour, as for wit, our novel need possess neither quality, but if either should happen to be present in it, the humour must not be deep, nor the wit subtle. Finally, and most important,

our novel must, as I have already pointed out, be an absolutely sincere expression of the author's mind; but it need not be an expression of the whole of his mind.

Given the heaven-sent author, is there any reason why such a novel as I have circumscribed should not be a distinguished work of art?

Miss Braddon

II

Miss Braddon

THE great public is no fool. It is huge and simple and slow in mental processes, like a good-humoured giant, easy to please and grateful for diversion. But it has a keen sense of its own dignity; it will not be trifled with; it resents for ever the tongue in the cheek. When you address it you may turn aside your face to hide a smile; you may deceive it and continue to deceive it; but sooner or later—often sooner—the great mild-eyed public will awake to the disrespect. And then there is an end of you, for you are ignored. That is the only and sufficient punishment: the cut direct. This explains why many authors flourish and suddenly fade in the general esteem, though their work seems to a critical taste not to have worsened from its original mediocrity: they have been found out. The public is not mocked; and even now sundry glittering reputations are about to suffer extinction. It

also explains why those popular authors who have never despised the public's shrewdness and dignity receive so great and permanent a reward.

Among such authors to-day the foremost is Miss M. E. Braddon, affectionately known in a million homes as the contriver of *Lady Audley's Secret*. Miss Braddon is over sixty, she has written over sixty novels, and not once has she deviated from the narrow way of literary honesty; not once has she, by offering less than her best, presumed upon the fame of former successes. She has never been perfunctory, never spared her energies nor withheld her talent; she has given full measure and flowing over. And, while remembering the respect due to her tremendous patron, she has not forgotten that due to herself. Here is the foundation of her renown, which has been slowly built during a career of forty years. We are so accustomed to that renown that we may not, without consciously taking thought, realise its extent. Consider its universality, its uniqueness. It is a fact that there are thousands of tolerably educated English people who have never heard of Meredith, Hardy, Ibsen, Maeterlinck, Kipling, Barrie, Crockett; but you would travel far

before you reached the zone where the name of Braddon failed of its recognition. Miss Braddon is part of England; she has woven herself into it; without her it would be different. This is no mere fanciful conceit. She is in the encyclopædias; she ought to be in the dictionaries, a common noun, for she stands for something which only schoolboys need ask to be defined.

So much for her position, in the national regard, to-day. To state the position is easier than to find the first cause of it in her books. Nevertheless that cause should be discoverable therein. One naturally turns to *Lady Audley's Secret*. Though this was not her first book, as is often supposed, it was her first, and perhaps her most brilliant, success. It appeared in 1862. Miss Braddon had been an acted playwright two years before that date, and she had also done novels. *Lady Audley's Secret* seems old-fashioned now. It refers to postillions and chariots, and Shoreditch Station (instead of Liverpool Street). The tone is often frankly religious. The hero always takes a pint of sherry to his dinner. The champagne is Cliquot instead of Veuve Cliquot. Despite these marks of time upon its outer garment, the essential vitality of the novel is not

yet expended. Clearly it was written with a full pen, and it still lives: it is not dust. In 1862 the plot may or may not have been original; it has been used a thousand times since. But it is a plot admirably adapted for a broad and simple sensationalism. Take a young and beautiful woman, golden-haired, amiable, exquisitely feminine. Surround her with every circumstance of happiness—a wealthy middle-aged husband, who worships her innocent simplicity; a fine old English home; the universal adoration of dependents. Then lift the edge of the curtain of the past, disclosing behind it the monstrous shadow of a crime. Slowly raise the curtain and raise it, till the full history of this enchanting creature, who at twenty has begun life again, stands dreadfully clear. That, save for a couple of minor passions, is the whole of *Lady Audley's Secret.* In two respects the book differs strangely from the usual sensational novel. The reader is never stretched on the rack of curiosity. "My lady's" guilt, and the nature of her secret, are made transparent from the first; nor can the reader reasonably doubt that the missing man is safely alive somewhere. Again, the ending is not entirely happy, and such happiness as occurs is by no means insisted upon. The

story leaves, indeed, an effect of slight melancholy; for, while the reader is ultimately compelled to pity Lady Audley, she is not spared from a horrible fate. The modern newspaper syndicate, with its "finger on the public pulse," might have accepted *Lady Audley's Secret*; but it would certainly have returned it to the author for the addition of mystery and a more complete final happiness. Why, then, it may be asked, did *Lady Audley's Secret* so abundantly conquer the public? The answer to the question is: Partly by the slow and various ingenuity by which the crime is laid bare and the criminal convicted, but more by reason of the fulness and sincerity of the book's inspiration. The young author meant every line of it intensely, and neither her invention nor her vision ever flags. She is fecund, opulent in a certain sort of imagination. Indeed, I should hesitate to deny to Miss Braddon the title of artist. When, with a mind hypersensitised to receive critical impressions, I read *Lady Audley's Secret*, my chief feeling was one of surprise at its level excellence, its honesty, its fine disdain of trade tricks. And I was astonished, too, at the sound vigour of the writing. Miss Braddon might have been a notable stylist had she chosen; she has the

essence of the matter. Not infrequently she strikes the true lyric note:—

"He will do it," she said, between her set teeth; "he will do it unless I get him into a lunatic asylum first; or unless——"

She did not finish the thought in words. She did not even think out the sentence; but some new and unnatural pulse in her heart seemed to beat out each separate syllable against her will.

The thought was this: "He will do it, unless some strange calamity befalls him and silences him for ever." The red blood flashed up into my lady's face with as sudden and transient a blaze as the flickering flame of a fire, and died as suddenly away, leaving her paler than winter snow. Her hands, which had before been locked convulsively together, fell apart and dropped heavily at the sides. She stopped in her rapid pacing to and fro—stopped as Lot's wife may have stopped, after that fatal backward glance at the perishing city, with every pulse slackening, with every drop of blood congealing in her veins in the terrible process that was to transform her from a woman into a statue.

Lady Audley stood still for about five minutes in that strangely statuesque attitude, her head erect, her eyes staring straight before her—staring far beyond the narrow boundary of her chamber wall, into dark distances of visionary horror.

That is English. Wilkie Collins could not have done it; Hugh Conway could not have done it; nor, I dare to say, sundry greater men whom to name in this connection would be to call forth a protest; nor any other living sensa-

tional writer. *Staring far beyond the narrow boundary of her chamber wall, into dark distances of visionary horror!* It is prose. It has the genuine vital impulse—the impulse which created *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Wuthering Heights*, and other masterpieces of dread.

Lady Audley's Secret is in Miss Braddon's early manner, and, though in some ways it remains unsurpassed by later work, she has developed in her middle and later periods a manner which is at once more elaborately skilful and more especially her own. In passing, I will point out that novels like *Ishmael* and *London Pride*, both historical, and of which the interest lies in character rather than event, stand apart from the body of her production. They are good novels, and more than a proof of versatility, but they are scarcely "Braddon." A good typical Braddon of the later period is *Rough Justice*, standing fifty-seventh in the catalogue of that uniform edition whose picture-boards ornament the railway stations of three kingdoms. In the opening scene of *Rough Justice* Miss Braddon is exactly herself. The half gay, half melancholy bustle of the steamer's departure, and the unexpected joyous meeting of Arnold Wentworth and Mary Freeland, both young and

alert and shrewd and clever and agreeable: these things, with the low-voiced hints of forgotten sins which will yet demand a penalty, are done with absolute precision of touch. Miss Braddon always likes her young characters, and she always paints them with a special *verve*. The whole chapter is steeped in the kindliness, sagacity, and optimism which mark the author's temperament, and which constitute, apart from technical powers, the secret of her popularity. Miss Braddon is of those who have seen much, and have learnt charity therefrom. There is no narrowness in her. She has a heart which will contain the world. And she is aware of her world, she has studied it professionally for forty years. All has been fish that has come into the net of her memory. She is a Whiteley of actualities, and no matter what her story she can connect it closely with that which Mrs Meynell has well called the "dailiness" of life. She knows. She knows the ways of prosecuting counsel at Bow Street, how lodgers bang doors, what game is shot in South Africa and the Dutch name of it and the name of the gun, how a ship leaves port, and how a guttersheet dies. This is another part of her attraction. She can take the morning paper and render it

back again to the man in the street exquisitely transformed into something more agreeable, more gracious, and less disturbing. The man in the street reads *Rough Justice*, and says: "This is life, because I recognize the facts." And he is right in his way.

Rough Justice is a murder-mystery; Miss Braddon knows better now than to disclose her secret at the beginning. The interest of the tale turns on the detection of the murderer. At the start, of course, an innocent man is accused, but he is acquitted. It may be noted here that the concocter of crime-mysteries probably works backwards. Construct the actual crime and make it credible without being obvious; then construct a contemporaneous set of circumstances capable of offering an obvious solution, and disclose this first. The two chains of events need only touch at a single point; and that point is the Coincidence. The mystery-monger is entitled to one coincidence, not more. Miss Braddon seldom exceeds her allowance. Her constructions are full of ingenuity and resource. The retirement of the Inspector in *Rough Justice* is a piece of pure inspiration. It is necessary to observe particularly that Miss Braddon in her later books communicates the

feeling of mystery not by means of atmosphere, but by means of contrasted facts plainly stated. There is fifty times more sense of mystery and apprehension in the night-picture of the crime on the cover than in the whole of the book itself. Miss Braddon, if I am not mistaken, abandoned early the machinery of "atmospheres," which she used so effectively in *Lady Audley's Secret*. She was doubtless drawn towards facts as she grew older. The development must have assisted her popularity, for the great public prefers the concrete to the vague and suggestive.

Prosper Merimée said that all the characters of Balzac, even the scullions, have genius. Similarly one may say that in all Miss Braddon's characters there is a certain quality of *comfortableness*: they do not irritate; whatever their vagaries, you know that a final appeal to their good sense and broad charity will not be in vain: there is something at the bottom of them. Miss Braddon has a vast embracing sympathy. Sin must be punished; the future must pay for the past: but, this being granted, let us have riches and bright tempers, and eat well and dress well, and live in glorious old mansions. The life of the English country house, with its luxurious solidity—with what

unaffected satisfaction she describes it! Miss Braddon is human; she represents the best aspect of average humanity—that "ultimate decency" which resides somewhere in everyone. It is this quality which is the deepest root of her success. Probably she would not exchange it for the first-rate passionate imagination which she lacks, and which might have made her great.

Mr J. M. Barrie

III

Mr J. M. Barrie

It is twelve years since the publication of *A Window in Thrums*, and in the meantime Mr Barrie has issued only three novels. When a favourite of the public asserts himself only once in four years he takes the risk of being forgotten, or at least of receiving polite interest in exchange for enthusiastic admiration; but Mr Barrie's fame is as authentic, as actual, to-day as it was in 1889. Although *Auld Licht Idylls* preceded *A Window in Thrums*, it was the latter which, at a single stroke, established its author's position. *A Window in Thrums* secured for Mr Barrie more than the warm regard of his readers; it secured their unchangeable affection; so that everyone is incurably prejudiced in his favour, everyone is jealous for his reputation, everyone is ready to make excuses for him. And it may be said that he has needed excuses; for in these twelve years only his ambition has developed. He has industriously tried to write a great novel, but

he has failed; we loyally cover up his failure, pointing to this and that excellence of his books, and assuring one another that none but a man with a touch of genius could have written them; nevertheless we cannot entirely hide our disappointment, and occasionally we hint to him that he might return to short stories. We still confidently believe that he will repeat the success of *A Window in Thrums*, and we shall continue to believe: it is an article of faith; in order not to forget it we constantly remind ourselves of it.

Now, after twelve years, it is permissible and proper to examine the foundation of a man's fame, to test, if we can, its ultimate security. We shall always love *A Window in Thrums*, but that need not prevent us from attempting to find out whether or not it quite deserves all our passionate worship. Our chief boast concerning *A Window in Thrums* has ever been that it makes us both laugh and cry, and we have said this in a tone to imply that to cause laughter and tears is the first and noblest aim of imaginative literature. But the first and noblest aim of imaginative literature is not either to tickle or to stab the sensibilities, but to render a coherent view of life's apparent

incoherence, to give shape to the amorphous, to discover beauty which was hidden, to reveal essential truth. The great artist may force you to laugh or to wipe away a tear, but he accomplishes these minor feats by the way. What he mainly does is to *see* for you. If, in presenting a scene, he does not disclose aspects of it which you would not have observed for yourself, then he falls short of success. In a physical and a psychical sense his power is visual, the power of an eye seeing things always afresh, virginally, as though on the very morn of creation itself.

This supreme visual power, this virtue of the eye which creates by seeing, Mr Barrie does not possess. No trace of it is discoverable in any of his work. He can select his facts with exquisite skill, but he sees them as a plain man. Take one of the most famous pieces in *A Window in Thrums* —a piece which the author thought sufficiently good to use again in the stage version of *The Little Minister*—"Preparing to receive company." There is nothing in it that the average reader would not have learnt for himself had he been fortunate enough to witness the scene recorded. The humour of it wants no reveal-

ing, and it is neither subtilised nor intensified. The incident is intrinsically and obviously amusing, and the author's phrases are happy—and that is all. It is the unconscious conviction of this lack of visual—that is, creative—power which drives Mr Barrie to be always, at any cost, either humorous or pathetic, and to divert by nimbleness of fancy and jugglery of phrase. When he is neither humorous nor pathetic he is nothing. *A Window in Thrums* is one long oscillation between making a certain class of people ridiculous by reason of their manners, and making them dignified by reason of their extraordinary trials and fortitude. There is no "setting" to the pictures, no landscape, no verbal beauty, no feeling for anything except the figures; the figures might be against a background of brown paper; they are posed like models in a studio; you will find no Egdon Heath in Mr Barrie, no sense of nature's large inclusiveness; with Mr Barrie man is man, and nature is something different, something negligible. As regards the humour and pathos, which alone constitute the book (imagine a diet of sugar and salt, a literature consisting solely of humour and pathos!), the humour is more spontaneous than the pathos. The pathos

is too much insisted upon, even forced—as in "Waiting for the Doctor" and "Jamie's Home-coming." One cannot but observe how again and again the author saddens one with the fact that it all happened long ago, "in the dear dead days beyond recall," that everyone is dead and buried now, and the old house in ruins. This, to be frank, is not playing the game. From the beginning Mr Barrie has had a tendency to sentimentalise, by which I mean to affect or exaggerate sentiment; the tendency was distinctly to be felt in *A Window in Thrums*; in *The Little Minister* it became more marked, more noticeably saccharine; and in the stage version of *The Little Minister*, that excessively profitable lump of sweetstuff, it amounted to a confirmed habit of mind.

When we arrive at the "Tommy" books—that history of the poor boy who runs off to London and becomes a renowned author—we are in Mr Barrie's second period, his analytic period. We find here that his literary sense, never refined nor robust, has almost disappeared. His prose is even more commonplace, more completely devoid of charm, and the dignity of the novel is openly mocked. "There were no fish to catch, but there was a boy trying to catch

them." "At those moments the essence of all that was characteristic and delicious about her seemed to have run to her mouth, so that to kiss Grizel on her crooked smile would have been to kiss the whole of her at once." "Young men about to be married used to ask at the bookshops, not for the 'Letters,' but simply for 'Sandys on Woman,' acknowledging Tommy as the authority on the subject, like Mill on Jurisprudence, or Thomson and Tait on the Differential Calculus." This kind of thing, which abounds in both books, might pass in a farcical sketch for an evening paper, but in novels purporting to be serious it is contemptible and distressing. Mr Barrie seems to gambol through a story like a boy. He cannot resist the boyish impulse to "lark," and he seems quite unable to distinguish between wit and the most feeble smartness. That he should have chosen to write a two-part satire of nearly a thousand pages on a character with precisely the same failing as himself, was natural but unfortunate. "T. Sandys," as his inventor loves to call him, was sentimental enough, but his sentimentality is as nothing to Mr Barrie's. Both novels, and *Tommy and Grizel* especially, are charged with sentimentality, even at their

most satiric. The relations between Elspeth and her brother are an orgy of sentimentality. In *Tommy and Grizel* Tommy gives Grizel a plant to cherish; when it persistently droops she knows he is ill, and rushes across Europe to succour him; she drops down before him just at the crisis of his flirtation with a lady of title, and then disappears; he rushes back in pursuit of her with a velocity equalling hers; she is stricken with fever (of course); he nurses her back to life (of course); her mental recovery is not complete, but chivalrously he marries her. The manner of Tommy's death (he gets hung up on a spiked wall) is evidently meant for a ferocious stroke of satire; it fails in its effect because it is unrealised and unconvincing. Like all the story after Tommy's departure from Thrums, it has not been imagined—only invented in order to clothe an idea. The Thrums portion of the book—there are 260 pages about the hearts of Tommy, Grizel, Elspeth, and the manly lover of the last-named—is a tremendously detailed and elaborate piece of work; but it is tedious; and it is tedious because it is petty. There is no large poetic movement in it, no profound stir of passion; it seems out of the world, un-

related to the bigness of life, a twopenny affair which might excite a village. Except for the necessary exaggeration of its sentiment, it is an astonishingly correct chronicle of love and love's counterfeit, but its narrowness and its tepidity stamp it with an unimportance against which all the author's ingenuities of diversion are exerted in vain. The trouble with *Tommy and Grizel* is this: when it is true, it is dull; when it is not dull, it is either flippant or unconvincing; and it is marred throughout by a constitutional sentimentality. Here and there is a delightful page. The idyll of the lark (pp. 112, 113) is a bit of sheer loveliness—a perfect trifle. If a last proof were needed, *Tommy and Grizel* proves for the third time that, though Mr Barrie may be able to make a miraculous use of material which is ready prepared for him, he can do nothing great without such material. He cannot of himself convert normal life into material, and the reason is that he has neither the visual nor the lyric gift necessary to the transmuting of life into elevated art. He has succeeded twice, but only by chance; he is not, in the strict significance of the term, a literary artist.

Such is the conclusion to which reason leads

us. But when we return to the best parts of *A Window in Thrums*, we are apt to remark that we care not whether Mr Barrie is a literary artist or not, he is an undefined Something that we enjoy. As for posterity, posterity may think of Mr Barrie what it likes; and that is just what posterity will do, till it likes not to think of him at all.

Charlotte M. Yonge

IV

Charlotte M. Yonge[1]

THE English of all the world know the name of Charlotte M. Yonge, and if you ask them what she has written, they will unhesitatingly reply: *The Heir of Redclyffe.* She is responsible for other volumes—at least a hundred and twenty of them, for during fifty years she has shown the almost fabulous fecundity of a Dumas; and to the activities of an author she has added those of a journalist and a passionate religionist. The *Monthly Packet* is hers, and under the Southern Cross you will find the missionary college and the missionary ship which she built to further a cause. Yet, as she was at thirty, before the Crimean War, so she was still at seventy-five—with half a century of admirable accomplishment behind her—the author of *The Heir of Redclyffe.* That book is her sign-manual upon an epoch.

Those of us who live by weighing words in the balance have a habit of choosing our private

[1] This essay was written previous to the death of Miss Yonge.

perusals from a very narrow circle of literature. In my case, *The Heir of Redclyffe* happened to lie without that circle. The book existed in my mind as a "safe" story for girls. It would never have occurred to me to read it had I not encountered the following passage in Mr J. W. Mackail's *Life of William Morris*:—

> The romances of Fouqué, which supplied Morris with the germ of his own early tales, became known to him through another book which exercised an extraordinary fascination over the whole of the group, and in which much of the spiritual history of those years may be found prefigured—*The Heir of Redclyffe*. In this book, more than in any other, may be traced the religious ideals and social enthusiasms which were stirring in the years between the decline of Tractarianism and the Crimean War. The young hero of the novel, with his over-straining chivalrous courtesy, his intense earnestness for all such social reforms as might be effected from above downwards, his high-strung notions of love, friendship, and honour, his premature gravity, his almost deliquescent piety, was adopted by them as a pattern for actual life; and more strongly, perhaps, by Morris than by the rest, from his own greater wealth and more aristocratic temper. Yet Canon Dixon, in mentioning this book as the first which seemed greatly to influence Morris, pronounces it, after nearly half a century's reflection and experience, as "unquestionably one of the finest books in the world."

After that, to ignore *The Heir of Redclyffe*

was clearly impossible. I read it. As a piece of literary art it seems to me to fall short of distinction. It is not, on the whole, strongly imagined, though I must own to being moved by the simple and profound tragedy of the hero's death. Its faults of construction, and the absence of dramatic feeling, make it tedious; there is no economy of means, no reticence, no selection, and the length is prodigious—nearly a quarter of a million words. More important, there is no style, and even very little care for the dignity and refinement of English; to my dying day I shall never forget Charles Edmonstone's dressing-gown, which was *all over pagodas*. Finally, there is no humour.

However, no one desires, I least of all, to judge *The Heir of Redclyffe* as a piece of literary art. It is a document, and a document of marvellous interest. Already it has the air of old fashion, with its quaint locutions long since passed out of use. It appertains to a period: it goes with Mendelssohn's "Songs without Words," The Crystal Palace, Patmore's *Angel in the House*, Millais' "Huguenot," and the Albert Memorial. It shows us what we of to-day have gained—in intellectual freedom and wider horizons. But it also shows us what we have

lost—earnestness and the faculty of unashamed devotion to an ideal. We have our ideals now, but when they are mentioned we feel self-conscious and uncomfortable, like a school-boy caught praying. Moreover, such ideals as we possess are social. Ideals were moral then. Religion had a more authentic force; the Church a stronger sanction. There was Duty and there was Sin. People were frankly serious. They said: "Is this right? Is this wrong?" They fought against Self, striving for mastery. They yearned towards righteousness. And they did these things openly. The women of the race practised submission, holy ignorance, and almsgiving. For a maiden, the worst crime was to be unmaidenly, the noblest achievement to become the dutiful and sacrificial helpmeet of a good man of ample means.

What is it in the mere sound of the name "Amabel" that calls up a vision of that era —of the luxurious country-house wherein heroines played at "Definitions" and painted in water-colours, and permitted the chivalrous advances of eligible cousins; of the family circle gathered at evening round "the instrument," while the superb tenor of the hero-baronet joined in some rendering of "Belle

Mahone" or "Look Aloft"; of polite couples "pacing the terrace" in philosophic converse; of blushes, trepidations, and sudden self-concealments from the family gaze? Amabel signified all this for me before I knew her. And now that I know her I may "quiz," but I also admire. Amabel is the more heroic of Miss Yonge's two heroines, the one absolutely without soil. Laura, the elder sister, was a girl nobly loyal; but she was guilty of a secret attachment. Knowing that Philip loved her, she did not divulge the fact to her parents. For Amabel such conduct would have been impossible. She was engaged to Sir Guy, loved him devotedly; yet when Guy, desiring to borrow a thousand pounds for a secret purpose, was suspected of gambling, she honestly strove, in accordance with the paternal behest, to "think no more of the fellow." Even when her brother offered to show her a letter which he had publicly received from the banished youth, she first ran to her mother, and, "averting her face," said: "Mamma, dear, do you think I ought to let Charlie show me that letter?" Mamma, to her eternal credit, said, "Yes, dearest," though with qualms. The affair of the thousand pounds was explained on

Guy's death-bed. He had wanted it—you will never guess!—in order to found a religious sisterhood; but Amabel's features had no ostentatious smile of moral triumph. These two sisters, amiably inane on days of ease, shone brightly in suffering. It was adversity which proved them. In the hour of disaster their figures take on a strange tragic dignity. The secret of the saints was theirs; they knew the joy of sacrifice and the ecstasy of renunciation. In their faces I seem to see the placid, glowing spirituality of the young nun as she gathers the napkin under her chin and closes her eyes to receive the sacred wafer.

And Sir Guy—that Siegfried with the addition of piety; that Saint Francis with an ancestral estate! They are coarse who would laugh at him. He is not to be mistaken for a prig. Philip is the prig, and it is one of the functions of Philip's priggishness to preserve Sir Guy from any suspicion of the same quality. Sir Guy must be accepted as the author offers him—as an ideal of a man, an ideal perhaps bizarre after forty-six years, but comprehensible enough, perfectly consistent, and far from ignoble. To make Sir Guy Miss Yonge gathered up all the dreams and pure

aspirations of a girlhood passed remote from the world. She remembered all the masculine excellences of her fancy, and imagined a male creature. She did not trouble to compare this male with the males of earth; and she was artistically right in refraining. She acted as a poet then, not as a realist. Realism was as yet uninvented. Miss Yonge bravely discarded the trivialities of verisimilitude, and with an equal courage she scorned the scorn of the profane. With her piety was the first virtue, and so Sir Guy had to be pious. He is vocally pious. He wears his piety upon his sleeve, but it is also within his breast. He is not perfect. Had he been perfect he could have had no motive for that war against the lower self, which, for Miss Yonge, was so specially the essence of true living. Therefore Sir Guy had to be afflicted with a fiery and hasty temper, a temper invented by Miss Yonge only that Sir Guy might ultimately subdue it—and die. These momentous matters settled, Miss Yonge was at liberty to be romantic. She made Sir Guy handsome, dark, mysterious, wealthy, and endowed him with a castle conveniently situated near the sea, so that he might behave splendidly at a shipwreck. She

gave him every grace, every moral fascination, the manners of an ambassador, the sweet reasonableness of a philosopher, the humility of a saint. Indeed, apart from his temper, he is not of earth. He never existed, never could exist, save in the devout and serious vision of a girl untouched by the world.

There are obvious reasons why the influence of *The Heir of Redclyffe*—waning, but still powerful—should have been not on the side of progress and intellectual enlargement. It is narrow, dogmatic, inelastic, conventional. Yet one cannot regret it. Are not the angels conservative? If the book has not been an urgent force, it has been a refining fire. Consider the thousands of "English homes" into which it has entered, like a message: those discreet interiors where, sheltered from the east wind of facts and the hot noon of actuality, the exquisite flower of girlhood has been reared. Read on interminable winter evenings before drawing-room fires, pondered over in walled gardens on summer afternoons—*The Heir of Redclyffe* had no imperfection then. Its limited view, its sweeping omissions, its ignorance, its one-sidedness, its perversions, its impossible dialogue, its undramatic tediousness, its stilted English—these

things were not noticed then; they slipped off like an abandoned garment, and the book stood forth for what it was, an impassioned invitation to the young soul to arise and purify itself. As such it was meant. As such it has done its work, and is still doing.

Touching its alleged effect upon Morris and Burne-Jones, that entirely puzzles me. Canon Dixon's appreciation I can understand, and, understanding, can tolerate. But that two of the most individual and daring artists of the century should have been influenced by a book so lacking in both æsthetic beauty and original ideas is a mystery which would need for its solving an inquiry into the moral basis of the great artistic movement of the fifties.

Miss Rhoda Broughton

V

Miss Rhoda Broughton

The morning-room is comfortable, but so are not its occupants —only two—of whom the one has within the last five minutes sprung a mine upon the other. It must have been inside this small time-limit since the clock on the narrow eighteenth-century mantelpiece had struck the half-hour, while the footmen were carrying in the last lamp and dropping the last curtain.

The sea of faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating to the breath
Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

THE appearance of a novel by Rhoda Broughton, written in her first and sprightliest manner, naturally brings up the large question of "the domestic novel"; for Miss Broughton, admired by Mr Andrew Lang, and disdained by Mr Swinburne in a withering chance phrase, is, perhaps, the typical novelist of our domesticity. Endowed with wit, sentiment, and a discerning

eye for some aspects of character, she has during thirty and three years given a modest and refined pleasure, not only to the *petites âmes conjugales*, but also to the great intellects philosophic, scientific, and economic, which in hours of slippered ease graciously "unbend" themselves over a novel. It is significant, and probably no mere accident, that the opening lines of *Foes in Law* should contain references to morning-rooms, mantelpieces, footmen, lamps, and curtains—the whole constituting a background for the fragrant cup and a proposal of marriage. "Instead of a cup of tea, he has asked her for herself." And "he" is a curate, and "she" is named Lettice. All these things conspire. If Miss Broughton had purposely tried to embody the characteristics of her school in a single scene, she could not have bettered the first ten pages of *Foes in Law*—that novel which, without harming him, might divert an archdeacon; which is being read by the mothers of the conquerors of the world; and which will doubtless be read by the conquerors, too, when they come home.

Since most of the fiction of Balzac, Turgenev, Thackeray, Tolstoi, Meredith, d'Annunzio, Hardy and Zola is domestic, it may properly be asked

what sinister or satiric import attaches to the term "domestic novel"? The answer lies in the fact that the adjective applies not to the themes of this particular class of novel, but to its public. The domestic novel is so called because it is written for, not because it is written about, domesticity. At the same time, since it may have wit, and even humour, and may be concerned with the affairs of adult people, it is not to be confused with the "story for girls." It is part of the artistic furniture of the home, like the ballad on the piano and the water-colour on the wall. It is admitted because it respects that "sanctity of the English home" which some other things—for instance, the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill—are said to "invade." Dean Farrar once wrote a book whose sub-title is "The World of School." There is "a world of home," which preserves its qualities only by ignoring every other world. The English world of home is one of the most perfectly organised microcosms on this planet, not excepting the Indian *purdah*. The product of centuries of culture, it is regarded, not too absurdly, as the fairest flower of Christian civilisation. It exists chiefly, of course, for women, but it could never have been what it is had not men bound them-

selves to respect the code which they made for it. It is the fountain of refinement and of consolation, the nursery of affection. It has the peculiar faculty of nourishing itself, for it implicitly denies the existence of anything beyond its doorstep, save the Constitution, a bishop, a rector, the seaside, Switzerland, and the respectful poor. And its exclusiveness is equalled by its dogmatism. In the home there are no doubts, no uncertainties, no "open questions." The code, surpassing even that of Napoleon, provides for all contingencies. This is right: that is wrong—always has been, always will be. This is nice: that is not nice —always has been, always will be. The earth may spin like a fretful midge amid problems, philosophers may tremble with profound hesitations, partisans may fight till the arenas are littered with senseless mortality; but the home, wrapt in the discreet calm of its vast conservatism, remains ever stable, a refuge and a seclusion for those who will accept its standards and agree not to create a disturbance.

It is for this wonderful institution, sublime in its self-reliance, living like a besieged city round which "ignorant armies clash by night," that the domestic novel has been brought into

being. It arose naturally and inevitably upon demand, and it conforms to the conditions imposed upon it as precisely as a good child. The domestic novel was born in the home, and it has never been past the porch. When its time comes it will expire of neglect in the attic. There is the home and there is the world, and sometimes on very stormy days the domestic novel goes to the window and looks out, and brings back to the fireside a mild report of the embattled sky; but that is dangerous; it is better to put a log on the fire and talk serenely of the tranquil microcosm. Therefore the domestic novel is usually occupied with domesticity, and in a domestic way—a way which avoids trouble by taking everything for granted. Can there be aught more delightful than the home? And can one imagine a more desirable home than the first-class country-house, where virtue, elegance, and wealth have combined to produce an environment and a piece of machinery of ideal perfection? This is why the domestic novelist makes a parade of footmen and the apparatus of luxurious comfort: not so much from snobbery as because such things are the symbols of an ideal. "A good home"—what aspirations,

narrow but intense, are in that phrase! Happily, even in the home, one is human, or the domestic novelist would be unable to extract his sedate dramas from that haunt of quietude. It is notorious, indeed, that the smaller the community and the more completely it is self-contained, the deeper will be its pre-occupation with its own trifling affairs. Hence the domestic novelist is likely never to be short of material. Miss Rhoda Broughton, in *Foes in Law*, treats domestically of the warfare between a squire's sister and his wife, two women of opposite temperaments. No larger interest is involved, nothing but the friction of these twain in the spacious apartments of a fine country-house. Conceive the deliberate act of sitting down to compose a whole book about the *tracasseries* of sisters-in-law! Yet here the book is, written out in full; and clever, too, adroit, amusing, and—so far, but no further—realistic. Housekeeping, pet dogs, private theatricals, benevolent societies, visits, and a convenient final legacy of thirty thousand pounds: such are the materials of *Foes in Law*, in which the tragedy of passion never rises higher than a misunderstanding, nor the ecstasy of it exceeds "domestic bliss."

Miss Rhoda Broughton

The significant fact is, not that a witty and talented author should have selected themes like that of *Foes in Law*, well assured that she would thereby give pleasure to an educated and refined public—Balzac did the same—but that she should have found success in treating them so trivially, with so absolute a detachment from the struggling world, with such a convinced air that here, concealed in this frothy mixture of jealousies and afternoon tea, was the essence of life, the one thing worthy to be talked about. Matthew Arnold, in his most human poem, cried:

> The sea of faith
> Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
> Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.
> But——

There is no *but* in the domestic novel, nor even the *but* sense, the vague, troubled apprehension of *buts*. The sea of faith, despite Matthew Arnold and all other would-be disturbers of an ancient peace, is still and glassy as that in which the infant characters paddle once a year.

> Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

which for Matthew Arnold drowned every other noise, is not heard, nor the breath

> Of the night-wind down the vast edges drear
> And naked shingles of the world.

Naked shingles of the world, indeed! At the first-class country-house, when the footmen by a united effort have dropped the last curtain, and instead of a cup of tea the curate has asked her for herself, there are no naked shingles of the world; only a lawn and a well-behaved moon.

Mme. Sarah Grand

VI

Mme. Sarah Grand

It is a characteristic of the literary artist with a genuine vocation that his large desire is, not to express in words any particular thing, but to express *himself*, the sum of his sensations. He feels the vague, disturbing impulse to write long before he has chosen his first subject from the thousands of subjects which present themselves, and which in the future he is destined to attack. He does not reflect: "I have something definite here to say; therefore I will write." Rather, his thought runs: "I am bound to write. What shall I begin with?" In other words, it is the act of creation, and not the thing to be created, which lies uppermost in his mind. But many writers, and many clever writers, use the art of literature merely to gain an end which is connected with some different art, or with no art. Such a writer, finding himself burdened with a message prophetic, didactic, or reforming, discovers suddenly that he has the imaginative gift, and makes his

imagination the servant of his intellect, or of emotions which are not artistic emotions. He may write very well, better even than some genuine artists—especially in the first flush of his eagerness—but his implicit disparagement of the art which he utilises will become more and more apparent, and no ability can hide the fact that, in so far as he is an artist, he is an artist by accident—simply because words, besides being the medium of an art, are also the best vehicle for the dissemination of ideas. The Word is his slave; and if, perchance, he treats it with a consideration that resembles love, he does so with a mercenary motive—in order to get the most out of it.

Mme. Sarah Grand belongs to this class. Even the American who opened conversation with a parson by the remark, "Guess you're interested in Christianity, eh?" would at once guess from her books that Mme. Grand was "interested" in the woman-question. Her business is with the ethic of sexual relations; and if she had not tenaciously held revolutionary views on the most delicate of subjects, she would probably never have written a line. The titles of her first books—*Singularly Deluded: a Domestic Experiment* and *Ideala*—

naïvely disclose her tendency. Without opening them you can see the passionate reformer running amok through all the cherished humbugs of an established system. *The Heavenly Twins*, equally famous and notorious, was a fierce onslaught which, it is safe to say, made a fearful breach in the walls of the Home—that demure fabric so long and faithfully defended by Charlotte Yonge and Miss Rhoda Broughton. The reactionary who fails to see that *The Heavenly Twins* did not leave public opinion, and particularly feminine public opinion, where it found it, has put the telescope to his blind eye. The book was eagerly and gratefully accepted by women, who perceived in it not only the bold utterance of their timid aspirations, but also a distant hope of release from the somewhat Ottoman codes of men. It was a bad novel—artistically vicious in its crudity, violence, unfairness, literary indecorum, improbability, impossibility—but it was a brilliant, though unscrupulous, argument against the "criminal repression of women" for the selfish ends of men. Its bitter temper is summed up in a single phrase, a phrase not bearing on the main point: "All that women ask is to be allowed to earn their bread honestly; but there

is no doubt that the majority of men would rather see them on the streets." Grandiose to absurdity—as in the "He, watching over Israel" refrain, incredibly preposterous in its excursions to the *pays du tendre*—as in the Tenor and Boy "Interlude," wickedly distorted when distortion could solve a difficulty—as in the truly amazing marriage of the heroine; it yet triumphed, almost insolently triumphed, by sheer primitive force: for might is right in art as in life. It was the rout of the male sex; it was the hare scattering the hounds. And the author, denied by nature the sense of humour, contrived, nevertheless, to use the weapon of ridicule with deadly effectiveness. It is, indeed, when dealing lightly with minor issues in the less dreadfully earnest passages, of which we will quote one specimen, that the author shows herself at her best and her most legitimate:

When breakfast was over at Fraylingay next morning, and the young people had left the table, Mrs Frayling helped herself to another cup of coffee, and solemnly opened Evadne's last letter. The coffee was cold, for the poor lady had been waiting, not daring to take the last cup herself, because she knew that the moment she did so her husband would want more. The emptying of the urn was the signal which usually called up his appetite for another

cup. He might refuse several times, and even leave the table amiably, so long as there was any left; but the knowledge or suspicion that there was none set up a sense of injury unmistakably expressed in his countenance, and not to be satisfied by having more made immediately, although he invariably ordered it just to mark his displeasure. He would get up and ring for it emphatically, and would even sit with it before him for some time after it came, but would finally go out without touching it, and be, as poor Mrs Frayling mentally expressed it: 'Oh, dear! quite upset for the rest of the day.'

It is slight, but it indicates the attitude, and it is an unanswerable "criticism of life" domestic. Even the Heir of Redclyffe's Amy, with all her yielding womanliness, would have appreciated that passage, After five hundred pages in the same spirit, the once august Sultan of the Hearthrug can only nurse his dying dignity and his mortal hatred of the shrieking sisterhood in speechless disgust.

If any recent novel has been saved, instead of damned, by its purpose, *The Heavenly Twins* is that novel. It is the modern equivalent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The soul of Mme. Grand, if I may employ the figure, was bursting with a message, and the message escaped sparkling like seltzer from a bottle. It came because it must come. She said what she had to say,

and she said all that she had to say. In order to be the more effectually a prophet she had attempted, not ignobly, the rôle of artist. Unfortunately she could not leave well alone. Unaware that she had finished, she continued to do what was already done. She had fallen into the habit of fiction, and she persisted in it, blind to the fact that she had exhausted the one ingredient which could vitalise her work. The case is common. *The Beth Book* stands much lower than its predecessor. All the bad qualities of *The Heavenly Twins* are intensified in this uninspired imitation. The violence becomes strident, the bitterness is envenomed, the crude philosophising still more crude; and there is no compensating conviction. In regard to marriage it will be observed that Elizabeth is compelled to submit to the same process as Evadne at the hands of her creator. A clever, observant, shrewd girl of vigorous mind, she is transformed into an abject little doll for a few pages in order that she may marry an unredeemed cad, and so pose as a marital martyr during the rest of the story. Immediately after marriage her qualities return to the victim. Mme. Grand, in making the husband the doctor of a Lock Hospital, stoops to an

infantile symbolism. "She liked him, and she liked to be caressed." Beth may have liked to be caressed—Mme. Grand's heroines have that predilection—but that she liked the ineffable Dan was impossible. Asked why she consents to marry him, she replies: "Because I'm weak." She ought to have replied: "Because it is necessary to my author's badly-planned campaign." As for Dan, we end by sympathising with the scoundrel, with such ruthless malignity does the author pursue him.

In *Babs the Impossible*—does not the title constitute a menace?—Mme. Grand is at her worst. The lack of any right feeling for the art which she practises is everywhere apparent; in the use of improper words like "perk," "grumped," "hunkering"; in a pervading literary indecorum, and in the extraordinary solecism of a pamphlet-interview exegetical of the author's high aims. From this brochure we learn that the theme of the novel is the plight of women left desolate in deserted country districts by the departure of their men-folk, who are attracted by the "glitter of towns." Mme. Grand, subtly drawn out by her interviewer, here glibly disposes of problems which have puzzled generations of publicists. "The com-

mercial greed" of landlords, it seems, is the worm in our English rose. Abolish that, and there is hope for the State plant. The whole interview is inexpressibly pert. But in the novel itself, though I have read it with care, I find small trace of the announced theme. The *locus*, being seventeen miles from a railway station, is certainly remote enough, but men are not absent from it, and silken dalliance is continually afoot. "St Lambert, taken unawares, yielded involuntarily. Before he had had time to think he had drawn her to him and kissed her lips. Babs nestled closer, *all her being a-purr with pleasure.*" Again: "She tore from its peg . . . an elegant tea-gown . . . slipped it on in trembling haste and stepped lightly to the casement. She leant forth. Her tresses streamed out upon the night. He stood below. . . . He wore a frock-coat and silk hat. . . . His legs were enclosed in white silk 'underwear,' for he had forgotten his trousers. . . . 'At last!' she just breathed, clasping her hands." This was not Babs, but a Miss Spice; the gentleman was named Jellybond Tinney. *Babs the Impossible* cannot be criticised as an art-work. It contains here and there fragments of fairly effective satire

but from beginning to end it is artistically hopeless. It repels without in the least convincing. The plot is grotesque and the characterisation incoherent. Which are the more farcical — the farcical parts or the deeply serious — is a question not quickly to be decided. Mme. Grand has in the past demonstrated her powers; this book is a regrettable proof of her limitations, both as an artist and as a philosopher.

"The Master Christian"

VII

"The Master-Christian"

SIZE is the quality which most strongly and surely appeals to the imagination of the multitude. Of all modern monuments, the Eiffel Tower and the Big Wheel have aroused the most genuine curiosity and admiration: they are the biggest. As with this monstrous architecture of metals, so with the fabric of ideas and emotions: the attention of the whole crowd can only be caught by an audacious hugeness, an eye-smiting enormity of dimensions so gross as to be nearly physical. The unrivalled vogue of Miss Marie Corelli is partly due to the fact that her inventive faculty has always ranged easily and unafraid amid the largest things. Even in the early days, a single world did not suffice her fancy; she needed two. Then, when humanity had proved too small a field, she dreamt of a divine tragedy, and awoke to conjure up the devil. After the devil, the devil's antithesis: it was bound to come, and

it has come. Barabbas, Satan, Christ: who can say that there will not yet be a fourth term to this gigantic proportion sum?

The daring brain which could conceive Jesus making the European tour at the heels of a Cardinal of the Roman Church has used no half-measures in the execution of the idea. If the theme is immense, crude, and obviously staggering, the treatment suits it. Unite the colossal with the gaudy, and you will not achieve the sublime; but, unless you are deterred by humility and a sense of humour, you may persuade yourself that you have done so, and certainly most people will credit you with the genuine feat. Such is the case of Miss Corelli and *The Master Christian.* From the moment when the good Cardinal Felix Bonpré finds the Divine Child, Manuel, shivering under the barred porch of Rouen Cathedral, to the grand climax of that same Child dialectically withering the Pope in the Vatican, there is no intermission of "big" situations. Manuel works miracles, curing lameness, stopping and annihilating bullets, and even raising the dead. He ascends the tower of Notre Dame, and stretches out his arms toward the city. "What dost thou see?" asks the good Cardinal.

"Paris!" replied the boy in strangely sorrowful accents, his young, wistful face turning towards the Cardinal, his hair blown back in the light wind. "All Paris!"

He was about to see a lecherous priest, worth five millions of francs, all but murdered by his illegitimate son before a churchful of *cocottes*. Later, Manuel journeys on to Rome. He and the Cardinal discuss the sights:

"St Peter's!" answered Manuel, with a thrill of passion in his voice as he uttered the name. "St Peter's—the huge theatre misnamed a church! Oh, dear friend!—do not look at me thus. . . . Surely you must know that there is nothing of the loving God in that vast Cruelty of a place. . . . Oh, what a loneliness is that of Christ in the world! What a second Agony in Gethsemane!"

In the Vatican, Manuel, not stopping at words, proceeds to glances:

"As One having authority—and not as the scribes!" said Manuel, with a swift, flashing glance, which, like a shaft of lightning, seemed to pierce through flesh and bone; for, as he met that radiant and commanding look, the jewel-like eyes of the Pope lost their lustre and became fixed and glassy—he put his hand to his throat with a choking gasp for breath—and, like a dead body which had only been kept in place by some secret mechanical action, he fell back in his chair senseless, his limbs stretching themselves out with a convulsive shudder into stark immovability."

Coming to London, Manuel presided at the heavenly translation of the good cardinal, and

arranged there for "a marvellous vision!—a Dream of Angels."

"Manuel!"

"I am here," answered the clear young voice. "Be not afraid!"

And now the music of the unseen choir of sound seemed to grow deeper and fuller and grander, and Felix Bonpré, caught up, as it were, out of all earthly surroundings . . . saw the bare building around him beginning to wondrously change. . . .

So much for Manuel. As the author says, "The personality of the little fellow was intensely winning." In regard to the human characters, they are sharply divided into two groups—the sheep and the goats. To be a sheep is to possess striking artistic and personal gifts; to be a goat is to have mistresses and bastards: there is no middle course; a middle course leads neither to the colossal nor the gaudy. Angela Sovrani, the heroine, was the greatest (moral) painter of her time, and, "unlike any other woman in the world," "a creature apart," "true, womanly in every delicate sentiment, fancy, and feeling, but with something of the man-hero in her scorn of petty aims." "Her laughter, sweet and low, thrilled the air with a sense of music." She

painted a symbolic canvas, entitled, "The Coming of Christ," which the United States nation bought, by cable, for a hundred thousand dollars. Her *fiancé*, an Italian prince, and also a painter (with a paramour), killed her out of artistic jealousy, and Manuel brought her to life again. Aubrey Leigh, the *jeune premier*, was "a brilliant scholar," and an ardent democrat; he would have become "supreme in histrionic art" had he not been repelled from the theatre by "the painted drabs called 'ladies of the stage.'" He was "the finest shot in England," and could improvise divinely on the organ. He wrote a book, "and found himself — like Byron — famous." He also "flung thunderbolts of splendid defiance at shams, with the manner of a young Ajax defying the lightning." He fell in love with one Sylvie Hermenstein, and Sylvie, "who seemed, by her graceful and *mignonne* fascinations and elegant toilettes, just a butterfly of fashion and no more, was truly of a dreamy and poetic nature—she had read very deeply, and the griefs and joys of humanity presented an ever-varying problem to her refined and penetrative mind." Mdlle. Hermenstein had a literary friend, the Princess D'Agrament, and

"the *Figaro* snatched eagerly at everything" written by this lady; while Angela had a literary friend, Cyrillon, "a daring writer who has sent his assumed name of 'Gys Grandit' like a flame through Europe."

The goats of the narrative are, with the exception of Angela's *fiancé* and a curate, all Roman Catholic priests, the book itself being, *inter alia*, what the author intends for an exposure of the Roman Catholic Church. Angela's *fiancé* kept a mistress. The curate declined to bury the child of a hapless girl whom he had seduced. The catalogue of sinful priests is a long one. The Abbé Vergniaud was father to the flame-like "Gys Grandit." Claude Cazeau, an Archbishop's secretary, seduced a girl named Marguerite; she went mad of her shame; one night she grappled with him ("he turned a livid white in the moon rays"), and they perished together in the Seine. Monsignor Gherardi, that powerful and august prelate, had a *petite maison*, "a superb villa, furnished with every modern luxury and convenience, . . . where a beautiful Neapolitan *danseuse* condescended to live as his mistress." Gherardi also made infamous proposals to Sylvie Hermenstein, "in low, fierce

accents"; but, later, when "Gys Grandit" crushed him in argument by referring to his family of bastards, "he reeled back as though he had been dealt a sudden blow, and over his face came a terrible change, like the grey pallor of creeping paralysis."

Perhaps the most wonderful thing about this book is that the author has faith in her work. By a thousand indications we are convinced that she truly believes it to be sublime. *The Master Christian* is a perfectly honest revelation of a personality. Egotistic, theatrical, vindictive, obtuse, and perhaps vain, that personality is nevertheless not a mean one. It is distinguished by a ferocious hatred of shams and by an earnestness almost terrible. Miss Corelli has the not-ignoble passions of the reformer. She must tilt or she will die. That her tiltings are farcically futile is due neither to lack of energy nor lack of sincerity, nor diffidence in attack, nor doubts, but simply to a complete absence of humour and artistic feeling, and her rhapsodic ignorance of life. Invincibly self-possessed and self-satisfied, conscious of power, and, above all, conscious of rectitude, she revels gorgeously in her lyric mastery of the commonplace, deeming it genius, and finds

in the fracas of pamphleteering fiction an outlet and satisfaction for all her desires.

Such a personality could not fail to arouse opposition, and, indeed, the feud which exists between Miss Corelli and those who actively interest themselves in modern literary art may be accounted for without difficulty. It is due not to the appalling and absolute wrongness and badness of Miss Corelli's books considered as works of art, but to the authority and acceptance which she has achieved among the multitude. Try as you may to ignore the multitude, you cannot. Numbers will tell, and it is right that they should. There is not a writer living to-day who does not envy Miss Corelli her circulation; and it is just that circulation which the artists of literature cannot understand. Is it possible, they ask in sad and angry amazement, that people can be imposed on by *this*? And they have an impulse to fling down the pen and take to grocery. But of course it is possible! That the question should be put only shows that in the world of books, as in every other world, one half does not know how the other half lives. In literary matters the literate seldom suspect the extreme simplicity and *naïveté* of the illiterate. They

wilfully blind themselves to it; they are afraid to face it. Let us point out here that the wants of those readers who happen to be without taste are seldom met exactly, for the reason that nearly every writer has some sort of taste, some feeling for the refinements of his art. The readers without taste usually read, therefore, work which is a little beyond their proper grasp. They do the best they can for themselves, but their normal reading condition is one of muddle and mystification, more or less acute. When an author comes along who can exercise force, fluency, and sincerity at the bidding of preferences precisely similar to their own, then it is that the illiterate gather together, and by the shoutings of their acclamation make themselves so painfully obvious to the literate. Then it is that the literate, awakened to the realities of the world, cry: Is it possible? Is it possible that Miss Corelli is regarded by tens of thousands of people as a profound philosopher and a beautiful writer? Let them ponder the two following passages:

The toy called the biograph, which reflects pictures for us in a dazzling and moving continuity, so that we can see scenes of human life in action, is merely a hint to us that every scene of every life is reflected in a ceaseless moving pano-

rama *Somewhere* in the Universe, for the beholding of *Someone* —yes!—there must be Someone who so elects to look upon everything, or such possibilities of reflected scenes would not be—inasmuch as nothing exists without a Cause for existence.

Angela did not reply—her hands had unconsciously wandered into the mazes of a rich Beethoven voluntary, and the notes, firm, grand, and harmonious, rolled out on the silence with a warm, deep tenderness that thrilled the air as with a rhythmic beat of angels' wings.

Let the literates ponder those two passages, and assimilate the stupendous fact that there are multitudes of persons—you can see them in the streets behaving quite nicely—who will accept the one passage for profound philosophy and the other for beautiful writing. And, perhaps, the fact is not so stupendous after all, but just an ordinary, self-evident fact, one of a series. The very man who is shocked that "people" should be deceived by *The Master Christian*, may himself be the ignorant victim of a kind of music or a kind of painting not superior to the kind of literature to which *The Master Christian* belongs.

It has been stated that this huge fiction (it contains a quarter of a million of words—especially such words as sublimity, majesty, radiance, flashing, infinitely, thrilled, indefinite, elfin, *Hélas!* luminance, grand, exquisite, frightful, overwhelming) has succeeded—in the com-

mercial sense—beyond any other English novel ever published at six shillings or any other price. That success, however, had been reached before the public had read a line of the book, and was due partly to the author's previous works, partly to splendid advertisement, and mainly to the official assertion, some time ago, that Miss Corelli had not written a novel entitled *The Sins of Christ*. But let us grant that the book has found favour with the majority of its purchasers; let us say that a hundred thousand immortal souls have been truly refreshed by it. This vast army of the simplicities would comprise the following classes:

1. (Overlapping the other classes.) Those who accept the gaudy colossal for the sublime.

2. Those who never miss "disclosures" about the Roman Catholic Church, who attend lectures by escaped nuns, and who say Romish when they mean Roman.

3. Those who only condescend to read fiction which "teaches," and who would doubtless be uplifted by the didactic harangues which the leading characters are made to declaim at every crisis in the story.

4. Those who enjoy witnessing any sort of "attack," even a street-fight.

5. Those neutral and sheepish minds who always contrive to like what a sufficient number of others like.

It remains to say that these persons might have favoured a more contemptible book. *The Master Christian* is absurd past all telling, but it has homogeneity, and with such a tremendous theme and scene, only a distinctly clever and audacious brain could have achieved that most difficult quality. The thing is serious and sincere; it shows a creditable and rare interest in large affairs; it is no mere weaving of a set pattern in fiction, such as contents many writers of genuine fine talent. It is ridiculous, but it is alive. And if you have no sense of the ridiculous, if you belong to the hundred thousand, you may well regard it as an impressive and magisterial work.

Miss E. T. Fowler

VIII

Miss E. T. Fowler

It is no fault of Miss Fowler's that she has been recently classed with the great novelists of the nineteenth century; but the opprobrium of an indiscreet admirer's foolishness usually attaches also in some degree to the object of admiration, and so, in the minds of those who care for literature, there must, however illogically, be a certain faint resentment against Miss Fowler herself because of her success. In writing her three facile and vivacious novels she was probably innocent of any suspicion that, being taken seriously, they would reach an aggregate circulation of a hundred and fifty thousand copies, and so place her where she at present is, in the very pupil of the public's eye. No matter! One may trespass innocently, but the penalty remains. When she hears the cold and inimical question, "What are you doing up there, and how did you get there?" Miss Fowler will have either to answer it by her

books, or, soon or late, obey the harsh behest, "Descend." And that last will be the sufficient penalty.

Without offering any prophecy whatever as to the future, it is safe to assert that Miss Fowler has not yet even begun to prove a title to the position into which she has been thrust. If the wonderful vogue of *Concerning Isabel Carnaby* was disconcerting, the still more wonderful vogue of *A Double Thread* was absolutely bewildering. As for *The Farringdons*, of which thirty thousand copies were exhausted on publication, though the best of the three, it marks only an inconsiderable advance, and a brief examination of it should show clearly that it deserves no better adjective than "bright." The heroine of *The Farringdons* is Elizabeth Farringdon, a distant cousin of two South Staffordshire Methodist spinsters, Cousin Maria and Cousin Anne, who owned a vast ironworks and socially ruled a district. The proper heir to the ironworks had been "a handsome, weak boy," named George, who ran off to Australia, and rumour said that he had married and died out there, leaving a widow and a son. The hero of the novel is Christopher Thornley, nephew of the general manager of the iron-

works. The birth of Christopher was not quite free from mystery, for his mother, like handsome, weak George, had run off and got married, and, a stricken widow dying in a London lodging house, had confided Chris to his uncle's care. Elizabeth and Chris, companions from childhood, fall in love, but only Chris is aware of the fact. Elizabeth by turns caresses and flouts him, and the honest-hearted youth keeps well the secret of his devastating passion. In due course Elizabeth grows up, and a clever and plausible stranger comes to occupy a neighbouring chateau, "The Moat House." I need scarcely state this stranger's name: it is Tremaine. If it had not been Tremaine it would have been Darcy. Tremaine, scoffing at creeds, and professing the vague religion of humanity, "gradually unmoored Elizabeth from the old faiths in which she had been brought up." Everyone else detected the hollowness of him; the common people defeated him utterly in spiritual argument, and Chris succinctly called him a conceited ass; but he imposed on Elizabeth. He might have married her had he not unfortunately proposed to her immediately after a religious service at which she had "found the Christ." In that moment of ecstasy she was

enabled to form a true estimate of his worth. Ultimately he married her school friend, Felicia, and had an unhealthy child, and was converted at its death-bed. Cousin Anne and Cousin Maria died, and Elizabeth became heiress to the Farringdon possessions, provided always that the true missing heir should not be discovered. Chris was the executor of this will, and he departed to Australia to search for the heir. Elizabeth burgeoned out into a great painter of moral ideas. She entered the art-world, shone at an Academy soirée, queened it in the highest circles, and nearly fell a victim to another deceiver, Cecil Farquhar. From Cecil she was saved by the pathetic appeal of a young woman whom the scoundrel had deserted in favour of Elizabeth's gold. Finally, she married Chris, who, it should be superfluous to explain, was himself the missing heir. Such is the plot. Outside the plot, and not connected with it, are a number of persons whose business it is to talk *à propos de bottes*. Chief among these are Mrs Bateson and Mrs Hankey, two Methodist housewives of the working class. The one is an optimist, preoccupied with marriages; the other a pessimist, preoccupied with funerals. Their grotesque,

farcical, and sometimes amusing chatter fills scores of pages. With one exception, not a single character in the book is at once realised and original. Save only Elizabeth, they are all either labelled and well-worn types, like Christopher and the spinster cousins, or mere names, like Felicia and Cecil Farquhar. Elizabeth has some existence and some originality. She is a very trying creature; often violently rude, and capable of atrocious vulgarity in the unwearied effort to be smart; but she is alive, and she possesses good impulses and a warm heart.

It is no doubt partly due to defects of plot and of character-drawing that the tale leaves no impression of reality, but another equal cause of its failure lies in the author's apparently complete ignorance of the craft of telling a story. Every chapter is a proof of this ignorance. Chapter IV., for example, entitled "School-days," and consisting of seventeen pages, is made up as follows:—

Death of Cousin Anne and its effect on Elizabeth	2 pages
Description of school and headmistress	3 „
A conversation on ideals concerning the future between Elizabeth and Felicia	3 „

A conversation about everything and nothing between Mrs Bateson and Mrs Hankey	7½ pages
Miscellaneous matter	1½ „
Total	17 pages

After this manner two years highly important in the moulding of Elizabeth's mind are expeditiously dealt with. The whole book is like Chapter IV., a shapeless medley of utterances which are beside the point. Miss Fowler is always forgetting her story and then returning to it with a sudden, alarmed start. It is the trifles, the surfaces of things, the unimportant side-issues, that engage her inconstant mind. Like her volatile heroine, she must be continually talking, stating, contrasting, sermonising, and composing essays instead of attending to business. Miss Fowler has accomplished the *reductio ad absurdum* of the amorphous English novel. She never grapples with a situation or an epoch of development; she never has time to do so. She makes Elizabeth pass from an amateur to a recognised artist in four lines. She is for ever telling you *about* her characters and never *presenting* them. The intimacy between Elizabeth and Tremaine gets as far as a daily interview before the latter has opened

his mouth to the reader. Miss Fowler is so busy with ideas—very superficial ideas—that mere men and women are forced into a secondary position. That the characters of the tale are not firmly established in her mind as living entities, that they are not authentically imagined, is shown by the fact that she often, from sheer thoughtlessness, allows them to behave in a manner utterly impossible. The notion of Elizabeth driving round the country alone with Tremaine in Tremaine's mail-phaeton would have staggered Cousin Maria, but Miss Fowler apparently regards it as a most ordinary procedure for a young girl reared behind the high spiked walls of strict convention. This is a mild instance. A much more serious one is Farquhar's letter to the sweetheart whom he jilted—a piece of caddishness and fatuity of which it is inconceivable that even Farquhar could have been guilty.

The prevailing quality of the book, colouring it everywhere, is its crudeness—of style, thought, feeling, and wit—the immature crudeness of a clever girl who, while already proficient in the jugglery of phrases, has yet everything to learn about life and about literature. Miss Fowler has no literary charm, no sense of style,

no reverence for her art. She quotes two lines from one of the loveliest passages in all Shakespeare (Constance's outburst, *King John*, Act III., Scene 1), and perpetrates a misquotation in each line. Here is a specimen of her metrical chapter headings—

> Shall I e'er love thee less fondly than now, dear?
> Tell me if e'er my devotion can die.
> Never until thou shall cease to be thou, dear;
> Never until I no longer am I.

A merely literary crudity will affect the large public neither one way nor the other, since the large public is entirely uninterested in questions of style; but all other crudities appeal strongly to that public; and herein lies the main secret of Miss Fowler's popularity. On p. 185 occurs the following sentence: "She had run downstairs at full speed in order to enter the dining-room before the dishes, completing her toilette as she fled; and she had only beaten the bacon by a neck." After reading *The Farringdons* from end to end, that phrase persistently haunts me, the supreme example of Miss Fowler at her most characteristic—*beaten the bacon by a neck.* It is precisely by such phrases that the large public is diverted. One such phrase would secure the success of a page, and Miss Fowler

will put twenty on a page. She can produce titillating phrases as a conjurer showers rosettes and guinea-pigs from an empty hat; and it is the endless titillation of them which constitutes her readableness. Wit, fancy, and philosophy—Miss Fowler pours out her treasures with marvellous fecundity and untiring glibness. There are no intervals, no dull moments. You might say of this book, as of a well-known public resort—"fourteen hours' continuous amusement." Not the most casual bit of description, but is fully adorned. Listen :—

Sedgehill High Street is nothing but a part of the great high road which leads from Silverhampton to Studley and Slipton, and the other towns of the Black Country; but it calls itself Sedgehill High Street as it passes through the place, and so identifies itself with its environment, after the manner of caterpillars and polar bears, and other similarly wise and adaptable beings. At the point where this road adopts the pseudonym of the High Street, close by Sedgehill Church, a lane branches off from it at right angles, and runs down a steep slope until it comes to a place where it evidently experiences a difference of opinion as to which is the better course to pursue—an experience not confined to lanes. But in this respect lanes are happier than men and women, in that they are able to pursue both courses, and so learn for themselves which is the wiser one, as is the case with this particular lane.

The fact is, that the uncultivated reader is

content to live wholly in and for the moment, sentence by sentence. Keep him amused and he will ask no more. You may delude him, you may withhold from him every single thing to which he is rightfully entitled, but he will not care. The more crude you are, the better will he be pleased. It is a magic gift, this power to titillate—an absolution for every sin of omission and commission, a blind for all defects. It will excuse the inexcusable. It caused thousands of people to condone the amazing plot of *A Double Thread*, and it will cause the same thousands to ignore the multifarious delinquencies of Miss Fowler's latest work.

There are, of course, subsidiary elements of popular success in Miss Fowler's novels—the old fashion of the plots, the sugared sentimentality, the smoothing-down of event and of character so as to avoid that disturbance of fixed and roseate ideas which the general reader seldom pardons in any novel. And there is the moral tone. "The tone of these books is so excellent," said a minister of the Established High Church to his bookseller. "I can put them into the hands of any of my young people." "Don't you think they are rather flippant?" the bookseller suggested. "Oh, no!" answered

the parson, "*It's all done in the right spirit.*" And it is. One may applaud Miss Fowler's spiritual intentions almost without reservation. She is cocksure, pert, superficial, slangy, unseemly (in a literary sense), and her hard, patronising attitude towards the universe is notably annoying; but at the root of her is something which makes for tolerance and moral, if not artistic, righteousness.

"Red Pottage"

IX

"Red Pottage"

THE strange phenomena attending the publication of Miss Mary Cholmondeley's novel, *Red Pottage*, which has now attained a circulation of over 50,000 copies, were of a kind more frequent in America than in England. But even in England, land of literary surfeits, there comes now and again a book which casts an instant and magic enchantment over the satiated public calling itself cultured, and "succeeds" before it can possibly have been read. On Tuesday, 24th October 1899, eight thousand copies of *Red Pottage* were offered to London, and it was also issued in New York and in the Colonies. Mr Mudie desired two thousand copies for his library. The trade generally was hungry and pertinacious. Over two thousand supplementary copies were ordered on 2nd November, and the same on 3rd November. A Teuton expressed a wish to translate it into German. Tauchnitz said that he wanted it, and a dramatist asked

permission to dramatise it. On the 9th, the first edition was exhausted, and large orders yet unfulfilled; but a great firm of printers had the affair in hand, and on the 15th, by the aid of their resources, a second edition of ten thousand copies was ready to be devoured. In the meantime, the morning papers sang together. England and Scotland lifted up one laudatory voice. "The book must go right to the front of contemporary literature." "The plot . . . would alone have secured for it the eager attention of critics." "The same gift of divining things, the same sincerity, and nearly the same insight as"—the author of *Jane Eyre.* "Challenges comparison with Charlotte Brontë." "Not to be surpassed in contemporary fiction." "Without doubt a masterpiece."

Such was the history of the first three weeks of *Red Pottage.* Many people asked: "Who is Mary Cholmondeley?" But these people were not subscribers to Mudie's. For Miss Cholmondeley, though she has written little, was from the first a sort of power at Mudie's. With *Diana Tempest* she secured a firm position there, and, though it is some time since *Diana Tempest*, the clients of Mudie—even those who make novel-reading the stern business of life,

and require a new story every day—do not soon forget a favourite. *Red Pottage* was sure of a special attention. It was not, however, sure of the enormous vogue which it enjoyed from the first and still enjoys. Sudden dazzling popularities have been a not infrequent phenomenon of late years, but the vogue of *Red Pottage* is still striking enough to startle. That it surprised the publisher himself is shown by the fact that the second edition of the book was larger than the first.

Thus at a single stride Miss Cholmondeley stepped from the comparative obscurity of being "a popular author" into the brilliant white light of full celebrity. On one day it was: "Mary Cholmondeley, you know . . . wrote a splendid thing called *Diana Tempest*, awfully interesting; you ought to read it." On the next it was; "Mary Cholmondeley . . . What, you don't mean to say you haven't read . . .!" And he to whom "Mary Cholmondeley" was unfamiliar had need thenceforth to hide his ignorance like a sin. That is fame. Miss Cholmondeley is famous. In a day she became so. Why?

In the first place there is strength in her work. I had read perhaps a thousand novels

since I read *Diana Tempest*, and forgotten nine hundred and fifty, but I clearly remembered that not only the plot but the characterisation of that story interested me. The talent was unmistakable. I resolved to keep the author in view. The sight of her name in the publishers' advertisements at once filled me with anticipations, and I perused *Red Pottage* at the earliest moment. I mention these facts because my experience was probably a common one. The opening chapters of the story effectually raised my curiosity. Hugh Scarlett has a *liaison* with Lady Newhaven. Lord Newhaven discovers the adultery (not before Hugh is sick of his Diana), and, with a calmness which is characteristic of him, invites Hugh to draw lots for the privilege of committing suicide within the next five months. Hugh, surprised, accepts Lord Newhaven's somewhat Ouidaesque proposition — and loses. The question is: Will Hugh abide by the result? Miss Cholmondeley has here an excellent situation. It is melodramatic; but none the worse on that score, since melodrama is a perfectly legitimate form of literary art, capable of the finest uses. (See Balzac's *La Grande Brétêche* or Scott's *Wandering Willie's Tale.*) She handles it with originality,

force, and ingenuity. At the end of the book surprise grows out of surprise in a manner productive of many thrills. So far as the Newhavens and Hugh Scarlett are concerned, *Red Pottage* is a good, exciting story, ornamented with some rather clever analysis of motive, and very well told, save for a slight occasional hesitancy and indirectness in the later passages.

But the *affaire* Newhaven-Scarlett is only a small part of *Red Pottage*. Miss Cholmondeley has no sooner stated her theme than she deliberately discards it. Gifted with what is called "a keen eye for character," she so preoccupies herself with the exploitation of the special powers of that eye that she loses sight of her story for a good two hundred pages. It is necessary to state here that Hugh Scarlett falls in love with a certain rare creature, Rachel West; that Rachel has an intimate friend Hester Gresley (who wrote the greatest novel of her time); that Hester has a brother, the Rev. James Gresley, with a wife and family; and that the latter have some snobbish plutocratic friends named Pratt. These people are spread abroad over the book. Their motives and actions are described in detail. Yet they

do not help the story; they have nothing but an adventitious connection with the story. It might be said that Miss Cholmondeley had fallen into the usual English error of writing two novels in one, but these extraneous persons and scenes do not in fact make a story by themselves. The sole result of them, viewing the book strictly as a work of art, is to fret and delay the satisfaction of an artfully aroused curiosity. Nevertheless, I imagine that the gross redundancies of the book have had a large share in the making of its success.

The popularity of *Red Pottage* springs from three things. The first is the melodramatic excitements of the main theme. These are good, but they pervade only a fractional part of the story. The second is the observation of that "keen eye for character" to which I have referred. Miss Cholmondeley sees character intensely, but very crudely. Her good people are too good, and her bad people are too bad. They seldom depart from their codes. Certain of her creatures she adores; certain others she hates. It is in the delineation of the hated that she renders herself popular. She observes them with positive rancour, and makes them the butt of a sarcasm

which is like a skittle-ball among the pins. Thus of the Pratts:

"Selina was the most popular, being liable to shrieks of laughter at the smallest witticisms, and always ready for that species of amusement termed 'bally-ragging' or 'hay-making.' But Ada was the most admired. She belonged to that type which in hotel society and country towns is always termed 'queenly.' She 'kept the men at a distance.' She 'never allowed them to take liberties,' etc. etc. She held her chin up and her elbows out, and was considered by the section of Middleshire society in which she shone to be very distinguished. Mrs Pratt was often told that her daughter looked like a duchess; and this facsimile of the aristocracy, or rather of the most distressing traits of its latest recruits, had a manner of lolling with crossed legs in the parental carriage and pair, which was greatly admired. 'Looks as if she was born to it all,' Mr Pratt would say to his wife."

So are the Pratts disposed of and labelled for ever, and the public persuaded that in reading *Red Pottage* it is appreciating social satire of a very subtle order. But human beings are not thus easily to be ticketed and shelved. Such facile and disdainful sarcasm may raise a laugh, but the art of it is neither serious nor delicate. In a word, it is coarse, and there is a great deal of it in *Red Pottage*. The Rev. Mr Gresley, for another example, is treated with the crudest hostility: he is a grotesque puppet, set up,

apparently, so that the author may gratify her anti-Philistine spleen in knocking him down.

The third element of popularity in *Red Pottage* is the strain of easy philosophising in terms of vague metaphor which runs through it. Here is an example:

"Most of us have in our time hammered nails into our walls, which, though they now decorously support the engravings and etchings of our maturer years, were nevertheless originally driven in to uphold the cherished, the long since discarded chromos of our foolish youth."

There is no doubt that this sort of reflection does please and even impress a certain type of mind. Of the thousands who will relish the quoted passage, not one could turn it into a plain statement of fact, for the reason that it is incapable of being so turned. "Chromos" stands for one kind of ideal, and "engravings and etchings" for another kind of ideal, but my belief is that Miss Cholmondeley herself would be puzzled to explain the rôle of "nails" in the metaphor. Yet the sentence has a pleasant and plausible air with it.

Opinions may differ as to the presence or absence of this or that quality of excellence in Miss Cholmondeley's novel. But on some points concerning it competent opinions cannot

differ: it is very clumsily constructed; it contains many passages and some characters which have no bearing whatever upon the theme; the author exhibits a shameless partiality among her characters; and she has almost no feeling for style in any fine sense of the word. These four charges could be proved before a jury. And so it must be asserted, strenuously though with sorrow, that *Red Pottage* is not a masterpiece, that it does not challenge comparison with Charlotte Brontë, that it is not unsurpassed in modern fiction, and that Miss Cholmondeley's reward has gloriously exceeded her deserts.

To utter a jeremiad upon the decadence of taste, to declare that literature is going to the dogs because a fourth-rate novel has been called a masterpiece and has made someone's fortune, would be absurd. I have a strong faith that taste is as good as ever it was, and that literature will continue on its way undisturbed. The signs and wonders marking the birth of *Red Pottage* have occurred before, and in a form even more acute. These things are naught. In ten years, in twenty years—what then? Perhaps then the excellent but impetuous public may remember that in 1899 "Zack" issued *On Trial* and that in those

days Mr Walter Raymond was also fertile. Who knows? In the meantime, let me admit with alacrity that Miss Cholmondeley is a writer of parts. Had she not been so, she could scarcely have written a fourth-rate novel, which is at least six degrees higher than the average.

A Note on the Revolution in Journalism

X

A Note on the Revolution in Journalism

It is a common saying of literary reactionaries that this is an era of "bits," "cuts," and "snippets," that the taste of the reading public is fatally impaired, and that the golden ages which began with Chaucer are for ever closed. Our bookstalls (they lament) "groan" with "trash" that can appeal only to the half-instructed, while serious productions of an improving and solid nature ask in vain for attention. Such, stated briefly and stripped of vituperative epithets, is the indictment. The answer to it is, as to part, that it is unsupported by evidence; and, as to the rest, that the present condition of our bookstalls, deplorable though it may seem to the myopic and unimaginative, betokens not decadence but progress. The praisers of times past, in their narrow survey of an epoch, have overlooked two important phenomena—the Education Act

of 1870 and the growth of commercial enterprise. The Education Act created a new reading public, a public not to be confused with that which bought Macaulay—and Martin Tupper. This new public had no tradition of self-culture by means of books. It found itself with the mechanical power to read, but with neither the habit of reading nor the disciplined intellect which are both necessary to render that mechanical power effective. Put it in a library, and it was as helpless as a sparrow tugging at a biscuit. It felt a desire for what its detractors have called "literary pabulum," but it could not define its need further than to assert positively that the stuff offered was unsuitable.

Then, with the hour, came the man. The man happened upon a nice, interesting little paragraph in a newspaper, and, enjoying it, said: "That is a real tit-bit. Why should there not be a paper consisting entirely of such things?" Memorable and momentous words, marking a historical occasion which was the inception at once of Sir George Newnes' vast fortune and of a whole publishing movement! *Tit-Bits* appeared, and was copied and elaborated in numberless forms. The innova-

tion was welcomed not only by the public of the Education Act but by a large section of the older public, which had hitherto sought fruitlessly for what it wanted. The conjunction of these two masses, so different in everything except the lack of artistic and intellectual culture, produced a market gloriously dazzling to the commercial instinct. Lancashire discovering India was not more profoundly stirred than the man of commerce when the success of the *Tit-Bits* school of journalism indicated to him the existence of this market, which his instinct told him might be indefinitely strengthened and widened by a due application of mercantile methods of nursing. The man of commerce knew well the lesson enforced again and again by a series of checks to British trade in various parts of the world during the last two decades. He knew the reproach against England that the British merchant always seeks to dictate to the buyer what he shall buy; and he could see that this had applied in a peculiar degree to English journalism. At once he effected a revolution, and the attitude of publisher to public was radically changed. The public, which hitherto had accepted meekly what the publisher pro-

vided, found itself elevated to a throne, with the publisher obsequiously bowing at the foot thereof. The old autocrats of *Maga* and *Cornhill* may be conceived as saying to their readers: "This is good for you; in consideration of a just payment we permit you to read it." And when these august periodicals were issued, the readers approached the perusal of them, certainly with some pleasure, but also with the austere and braced feeling of duty to be performed. The modern editor proceeds upon a different path. He explores the nature of the demand to be met as patiently and thoroughly as a German manufacturer. With a mixture of logic and cynicism he states boldly that what people ought to want is no affair of his, and in ascertaining precisely what they in fact do want he never loses sight of the great philosophic truth that man is a frail creature. He assiduously ministers to human infirmities. The public would like to read, to instruct itself, educate itself, amuse itself, elevate itself, but no effort and no sacrifice must be involved in the process. The way must be made straight, every obstacle shifted, every lion killed in advance. Inducements must be offered, and all the yielding must be on one side. Only

by such means can a new market, however vast potentially, be set upon a secure and steady basis. The new tactics could not fail to prosper, and they prospered beyond any expectation; their prosperity was so conspicuous that the most stiff-necked and conservative purveyors of literature were fain to adopt them.

If it should be asked what is the immediate, or what will be the ultimate, result of this revolution, now so completely accomplished that the ancient condition of things is already forgotten, the reply would be that the one is not unfavourable and the other will surely be favourable. Let us admit that the new school of journalism, especially in regard to periodicals not newspapers, has in a sense swamped and flowed over the old; that was inevitable, seeing that the output of to-day is probably twenty times that of twenty years ago. Let us admit that the "tone" (mysterious attribute!) of even the best organs has lost some of its former fine austerity under the contagion of modern methods: that does not prove that the general taste has declined; it proves rather that journalism, as directed by the commercial idea, is a truer mirror of the general

taste than once it was. Why, indeed, should the general taste have declined? Why should it not have improved with the improvement of civilisation? Since our poets and novelists spring from the common stock, is not the multitudinousness of these, and the comparatively high level of their technical excellence, some proof that the inclination towards literary art is gaining frequency among us? For poets and novelists must still be born, must still be the result of inherited traits and of environment. Let us admit, lastly, that any representative modern popular journal is, judged by the absolute standard, compact of offence to nostrils delicate enough to appreciate the virtues of comeliness, quietude, and austerity in art and culture. What then? There are degrees. Most questions are questions of degree. Is it not better that the man in the street, a creature scorned but nevertheless admirably unaffected, should read an English sixpenny magazine than that he should read, say, the Sunday edition of the *New York Journal*? And is it not better that he should read the Sunday edition of the *New York Journal* than that he should read nothing? Ignorance and indifference are the worst. A "smattering"—poor, despised

achievement—is finer than these. And the crudest excitement of the imaginative faculty is to be preferred to a swinish preoccupation with the gross physical existence. Therefore, when those of us with nostrils happen to pass the bookstalls which "groan" with offence, let us, casting off the mere dandyism of art, remember that these same bookstalls disclose the germ of a tremendous movement, and that everything must have a beginning.

The Fiction of Popular Magazines

XI

The Fiction of Popular Magazines

THE large circulations achieved by the three principal sixpenny illustrated magazines are the fruit of the most resolute and business-like attempt ever made to discover and satisfy the popular taste in monthly journalism. The conductors of these periodicals postulated an immense remunerative public which knew only "what it liked," and cared for no other consideration whatever; and then they proceeded to prove its existence. They were so fortunate as to be unhampered with any preconceptions about art and the ethics of art. Training their ears to catch the least vibration of that *vox populi* which for them was divine, they simply listened and learnt; and they learnt the quicker by sternly ignoring those beautiful and plaintive cries which had misled their predecessors in the same enterprise—the cries of originality, of force, of cleverness, of mere loveliness, of artistic

or moral didacticism. In other terms, the great Commercial Idea was at work naked and strenuous in a field where all previous labourers had clothed themselves in the impeding mantle of some genteel unmercantile Aim, divulged or unconfessed. Singleness of purpose, especially when reinforced by capital, is bound to triumph, and it has triumphed in this case. After much research and experiment, the formula for a truly popular magazine has been arrived at; development is accordingly arrested, at any rate, for a time; the sixpenny monthly is stereotyped into a pattern, the chief details of which can be predicted from month to month.

Now the fine flower of every magazine is its fiction, predominant among the other "features" in attractiveness, quality and expense. It is the fiction which first and chiefly engages the editorial care, which has been most the subject of experiment, and which (perhaps for that very reason) is in the result the most strictly prescribed. We shall be justified in believing that the imaginative literature now printed in the popular magazines coincides with the popular taste as precisely as the limitations of human insight and ingenuity will permit. It assumes, of course, varied forms; but we are concerned

only with the most characteristic form—that which is to be found equally in each magazine, and which may, therefore, be said to speak the final word of editorial cunning. This form, without doubt, is the connected series of short stories, of five or six thousand words each, in which the same characters, pitted against a succession of criminals or adverse fates, pass again and again through situations thrillingly dangerous, and emerge at length into the calm security of ultimate conquest. It may be noted, by the way, that such a form enables the reader to enjoy the linked excitements of a serial tale without binding him to peruse every instalment. Its universal adoption is a striking instance of that obsequious pampering of mental laziness and apathy which marks all the most successful modern journalism. Dr Conan Doyle invented it, or reinvented it to present uses. The late Grant Allen added to it a scientific subtlety somewhat beyond the appreciation of the six-penny public. Mr Rudyard Kipling has not disdained to modify it to his own ends. But the typical and indispensable practiser of it at the moment is Mrs L. T. Meade. The name of Mrs Meade, who began by writing books for children, is uttered with a special reverence

in those places where they buy and sell fiction. She is ever prominent in the contents bills, if not of one magazine, then of another. She has the gift of fertility; but were she twice as fertile she could not easily meet the demand for her stories. With no genius except a natural instinct for pleasing the mass, she has accepted the form from other hands, and shaped it to such a nicety that editors exclaim on beholding her work: "*This is it!*" And they gladly pay her six hundred guineas for a series of ten tales.

In a sequence entitled *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings*, by Mrs Meade and Mr Robert Eustace (it should be stated that Mrs Meade employs a collaborator who, to use her own words, supplies "all the scientific portion of each story"), the hero is a philosopher and recluse, young, but with a past, and the sinister heroine is a woman of bewitching beauty who controls a secret society. Mrs Meade has said to an interviewer that her stories "are all crowded with incident, and have enough plot in each to furnish forth a full novel." This is quite true. There is no padding whatever; incident follows incident with the curtness of an official despatch. In every story the recluse and the beauty come to grips, usually through the

medium of some third person whom the latter wishes to ruin and the former to save. In nearly every story the main matter is the recital of an attempt by the heroine or her minions to deal out death in a novel and startling manner. Some of these attempts are really ingenious — for example, those by fever germ, tzetze fly, focus tube (through the wall of a house), circlet and ebbing tide, explosive thermometer. Others— such as those involving the poison-scented brougham and the frozen grave—seem a little absurd; and the same is to be said of the beauty's suicide in an oxy-hydrogen flame giving a heat of 2,400 degrees Centigrade. Besides all these mortal commotions, the book teems with minor phenomena in which science is put to the service of melodrama. Thus, after the detective had covered the heroine with his revolver, "the next instant, as if wrenched from his grasp by some unseen power, the weapon leapt from Ford's hands, and dashed itself with terrific force against the poles of an enormous electro-magnet beside him. . . . Madame must have made the current by pressing a key on the floor with her foot. . . . 'It is my turn to dictate terms,' she said, in a steady, even voice." But perhaps the marvels of modern science are

best illustrated in this succinct and lucid explanation of the destruction of a priceless vase: "It was not till some hours afterwards that the whole Satanic scheme burst upon me. The catastrophe admitted of but one explanation. The dominant repeated in two bars when all the instruments played together in harmony, must have been the note accordant with that of the cup of the goblet, and by the well-known laws of acoustics, when so played it shattered the goblet."

For the rest, the well-tried machinery of coincidences, overheard conversations, and dropped papers is employed to push the action forward. "It is strange how that woman gets to know all one's friends and acquaintances," says the hero of the heroine. And it is strange. The descriptive passages present no novelties. Of a duke it is said: "He was well dressed, and had the indescribable air of good-breeding which proclaims the gentleman." The symptoms of mental uplifting and extreme agitation are set forth in quite the usual manner: "Two hectic spots burned on his pale cheeks, and the glitter in his eyes showed how keen was the excitement which consumed him." On the rare occasions when the hero allows himself to

soliloquise for the reader's benefit, his thought and language are conceived on the simple theatrical lines of an address to a jury: "From henceforth my object would be to expose Mme. Kolusky. By so doing my own life would be in danger; nevertheless, my firm determination was not to leave a stone unturned to place this woman and her confederates in the felon's dock of an English criminal court." Lastly, it is to be observed and specially remembered that the "love-interest," so often stated to be indispensable to the literature of the British public, amounts to nothing at all in *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings*. Certain pretty and amiable girls (Vivian Delacour is one, and Geraldine de Brett is another) cross the stage from time to time, bringing some odour of an artless passion; but in the dry light of that science which dominates and pervades every theme, these wistful creatures and their adorations are absolutely negligible.

"Wonderful imagination!" exclaims the reader whom the stories are so cleverly designed to allure, echoing the question of the hero's legal friend, Dufrayer: "Who would believe that we were living in the dreary nineteenth century!" Ask this reader what he

wants in fiction, and he will reply that he wants something "to take him out of himself." He thinks that he has found that magical something; but he has not found it, nor does he in truth want it. Nothing in a literary sense annoys him more than to be taken out of himself; he always resents the operation. The success of these most typical stories depends largely on the fact that they essay no such perilous feat. In the whole of *The Brotherhood of the Seven Kings* I have discovered not a trace of imagination, no attempt to *realise* a scene, no touch of vehemence nor spark of poetic flame. Nor is there any spirituality or fresh feeling for any sort of beauty. The spirit and the things of the spirit are ignored utterly. That coma of the soul in which nine men out of every ten exist from the cradle to the grave is thus never disturbed as imagination must necessarily disturb it. Imagination arouses imagination, and spurs the most precious of human faculties to an effort corresponding in a degree with the effort of the artist. To enjoy a work of imagination is no pastime, rather a sweet but fatiguing labour. After a play of Shakespeare or a Wagnerian opera repose is needed. Only a madman like Louis of Bavaria

could demand *Tristan* twice in one night. The principle of this extreme case is the principle of all cases: effort for effort, and the greater the call the greater the response. The listener, the reader, is compelled by a law of nature to do his share. The point about a member of the sixpenny public is that he coldly declines to do his share. He pays his sixpence; the writer is expected to do the rest, and to do it with discretion. There is to be no changing of the aspect; no invitation to the soul, that poor victim of atrophy, to run upstairs for the good of its health. The man has come home to his wife, his slippers, and his cigar, and shall he be asked to go mountaineering?

What, then, is it in these *gesta* of scoundrels and detectives which suits and soothes him? It is the quality of invention—a quality entirely apart from imagination. To see the facts of life—*his* facts, the trivial, external, vulgar, unimportant facts—taken and woven into new and surprising patterns: this amuses him, while calling for no exertion. He watches the wonderful process (and, of course, it can be made wonderful) as a child watches its Australian uncle perform miracles of architecture with an old familiar box of bricks. But he surpasses

the child in simplicity, because he fancies the box of bricks has changed into something else. He fancies he is outside the dull nursery of his own existence, and watching brighter scenes; yet the window-bars were never more secure or the air less free. Pathetic and extraordinary self-deception!

Mr Silas Hocking

XII

Mr Silas Hocking

THE case of Mr Silas Hocking deserves consideration. He is probably the most popular of living novelists. By comparison with him Miss Marie Corelli is esoteric, Mr Hall Caine the fad of a mere coterie, and Mr Kipling a timid emerger from the unknown. Mr Hocking has been writing for over twenty years, and during the whole of that extended period the sale of his novels has averaged one thousand copies per week. The exact total of sales, as officially furnished to me by the courtesy of Messrs Frederick Warne & Co., was last year one million and ninety-three thousand one hundred and eighty-five copies, exclusive of publications other than fiction. Such figures astound. They do not ask, they silently compel attention. They enshrine a dazzling and marvellous secret.

When in my thoughtlessness I began to sound a leading West End bookseller as to

the first cause of Mr Hocking's popularity, the austere reply was: "We have never been asked for his novels; we have never, so far as our recollection goes, had a copy of any of them in our shop." I should have known as much. Mr Hocking is a minister of the Methodist Free Church. His fame is rooted in Dissent, and Kensington never dissents. Though he is doubtless well-known in less orthodox London, it is in the industrial districts of mid and northern England, and perhaps also in Cornwall, that Mr Hocking chiefly flourishes. I have found in the bookseller's shop of a small provincial town whole rows of *Her Benny*, *God's Outcast*, *Ivy*, *For Abigail*; and the comment of the bookseller has been: "The market is constant. I buy them in thirteens and twenty-sixes. No, I stock practically no new novels except Mr Hocking's." In that town the literary topic of 1899 was not *A Double Thread* or *The Awkward Age* or the Browning Love-Letters. It was *The Day of Recompense*, by Silas K. Hocking, with original illustrations by A. Twidle (cloth gilt, bevelled boards).

I have read *The Day of Recompense* with curiosity. It seems to me to be less charac-

teristic of its author than other works from the same hand which I have encountered aforetime, but nevertheless it is individual, distinct; and one may gather from it some clue to Mr Hocking's success. To begin at the beginning, one must consider the attitude of Dissenters of the trading and industrial classes towards the art of literature. (The other arts, by the way, scarcely exist for them: they eschew the theatre; music means hymns, anthems, and sometimes "The Messiah"; to painting they are completely indifferent; architecture as an art has never occurred to them.) That attitude is at once timid, antagonistic, and resentful. Timid, because print still has for the unlettered a mysterious sanction; antagonistic, because Puritanism and the Arts have by no means yet settled their quarrel; resentful, because the autocratic power of art over the imagination and the intelligence is felt without being understood. In the single phrase of dismissal, "It's only a story," uttered with bravado as the last leaf was turned, I have detected all these qualities. One may say that imaginative literature exists here on sufferance, and only in so far as there is nothing to take its place. And therefore it must behave itself. It must not presume

on its magic power, or it will suffer the fate of a disobedient African god. How often have I heard the impatient words: "This is too exciting for me; if I went on I shouldn't be able to leave it!" It mustn't startle, for that would be sensationalism, and sensationalism is of the devil. It mustn't engage the intellect; intellect is reserved for theology, politics, and business. It must on no account be realistic, for these people seek in art a means, not of getting closer to life, but of receding from it—so mean and unlovely as life is to their unseeing eyes. It must show nothing new, for that would be disconcerting. Lastly, it must respectfully kneel to the current moral and spiritual ideal—that always present ideal (whatever it happens to be) whose mere existence, in an age not of ideals, is the finest trait in Mr Hocking's public.

See, then, how fiction lies bound and scorned, and yet must she smile and discreetly dance for the amusement of her grim oppressors! Changing the metaphor, let us call her a clever poor relation who lives by her tact. Decidedly the clue to Mr Hocking's vogue must be sought in neither his originality nor his power, but in his tact. He is not original, he is not powerful;

such qualities would be fatal. His hero, Roger Carew, is the squire's son, "bookish, studious, grave," "true as steel, chivalrous to the core, and generous almost to a fault." From childhood Roger has lived in intimacy with Kitty Bolitho, the heroine, who is pretty and impulsive and good, and has "friends and books and pets, and more pretty frocks than she could wear." Comes a time when Roger declares himself: "My boyish affection has grown into a man's passionate love." Whereupon "she burst out into a silvery laugh." "Oh, Roger, please don't. Now you are spoiling yourself and spoiling everything! Why can't we be as we have always been?" Then Roger disappears, and in due course his body is found in the river and he is buried. Kitty, who has been temporarily distracted by the designing attentions of Roger's wicked uncle, soon discovers that she loved only Roger. The villagers discourse upon the moral excellence of Roger and his influence for good. Roger's father dies, and the wicked uncle comes into the property and title. Then suspicion arises, at first like a thin cloud. Not Roger's body, but that of a man exactly like him, has been buried. At this point we are taken back to the point of Roger's disappearance, and we

follow his adventures. He is kidnapped by his uncle's minions, who imprison him and plot his death; but he escapes *via* a subterranean tunnel to the seashore, finds a boat, and boards a ship bound for somewhere. The ship is wrecked, and eighteen months are spent on a desert island; during that weary time Roger's faith "flickers and wavers," but comes back to him again, and "he is able to preach hope and patience and courage to his companions." Ultimately he returns to his domain and ousts the wicked uncle, whose dying miseries, however, he does his best to assuage. And finally there is Kitty. "'Darling,' he said at length, 'this is recompense for all.' And for answer she let him kiss her again." And that, plus a mildly amusing love affair between an Established Church young lady and a Dissenting young gentleman, is the whole of the plot.

Perhaps the enlightened reader may wonder where tact could enter into such a scheme. It enters in a thousand ways. The central mystery is nicely designed so as not to incommode the most tender susceptibility. The tepid scenes of sentiment are handled with fulness of detail and some conventional appearance of verisimilitude, while the melodramatic passages, the

thrills and excitations, are carefully kept down; all the desert island business is accomplished in a page or two. The recital of Roger's captivity and escape is dispassionately calm, and forms, indeed, a mere ground upon which the reader's imagination may work or not as it chooses. All the characterisation, and the play of character, is tremendously simplified, in order to arrive at a broad and easily grasped effect. Every complication beyond the main one is neatly nipped in the bud.

In short, the intellect and the intelligence are treated as invalids, waited on hand and foot; the only demand upon them is, that they shall sit up and take a little nourishment. To excite, surprise, strain, fatigue, bully them—that is by no means the plan. The policy is to soothe, to lull while gently diverting and sustaining. Only a sleepless tact could do this—and a tact which is natural, like that of the born nurse. Mr Hocking was born to his craft. His tact was not acquired. There is no question of a calculated design on his part to meet the taste of the Methodist million. He is the Methodist million made vocal. I have no doubt that he expresses himself in these books of his as sincerely as any Meredith or Henry James who

has sacrificed popularity to the artistic conscience. I am convinced that he never courted popularity. He has the single eye. His work is the work of a man with a moral ideal. To win admiration at the smallest cost of sincerity would be repugnant to him. He writes, obviously, to please one person; and that in pleasing one person he pleases a thousand thousand is due to the fate which combined in him the common vision with the vocal gift. Such success as his is not the reward of contrivance or artificiality, or even of long striving. It is not achieved: it comes. The wind bloweth where it listeth. Mr Hocking could no more give the recipe for *The Day of Recompense* than the boy Blake could say how he came to write:

> O deck her forth with thy fair fingers; pour
> Thy soft kisses on her bosom; and put
> Thy golden crown upon her languished head
> Whose modest tresses were bound up for thee.

The style is the man, be the man who he may, and it is the style which pleases. Also, it is the style which defies definition. I have tried fairly to explain the phenomenon of Mr Hocking, but from the start I felt it to be, in its essence, inexplicable. That tact of which

I have spoken is negative; it consists in refraining. What is it that Mr Hocking *does*? What is that quality, lurking in every sentence on every page, which attracts? To this question, though I have approached it sympathetically and without arrogance, I find no answer. When souls call aloud to each other in the night, each knows its fellow: and that is all one can say.

The Craze for Historical Fiction in America

XIII

The Craze for Historical Fiction in America

I

THE historical novel is not at present flourishing in this country. It enjoyed a renewal some few years ago when *A Gentleman of France* flashed sword in every face; but the brief force of that movement seems already to be expended. There can be little doubt, indeed, that the art of historical fiction is dead in England, and that he who would succeed in raising it must first create for it a new form, a governing convention more in accord with naturalistic tendencies than that which has miraculously survived all the artistic upheavals of ninety years. Matters are otherwise in America and France, the two countries nearest to us in art as in life. France is witnessing, or about to witness, a real renascence of the historical novel—a renascence which M. Emile

Faguet, employing a theory more creditable to his ingenuity than to his sagacity, explains on the singular assumption that realism has exhausted the material offered by modern existence. In America the historical novel overtops every other sort; it is making authors rich and turning publishers into millionaires; the circulation of it counts not by thousands but by hundreds of thousands, and the man or woman who, having omitted to peruse it, cannot discuss it with fluency, is thereby rendered an outcast. Two of the most notorious and amazing examples of its success, Mr Winston Churchill's *Richard Carvel* and Mr Paul Leicester Ford's *Janice Meredith*, have between them reached a sale of three quarters of a million copies in the United States.

These two long novels—they total over a thousand pages—both deal with the period of the American Revolution; they both include the figure of George Washington; and in other respects of tone, colour, sentiment, and incident they are remarkably alike. The chief thing to be noted of them is their perfect lack of originality; they are not the fruit of any inspiration, but a dish meticulously concocted upon a recipe, and the recipe is by no means

a new one. Conceive a musical composer who at this date should capture the ear of the populace by an exact, but lifeless, imitation of Mendelssohn. It is such a feat in literature that these authors have performed. To read their amiable stories is to wonder whether the art of fiction has not stood still for fifty years, whether the discoveries and the struggles of a dozen writers in France, England, and America since 1850 are after all in vain. *Esmond* is a great book, but no man of a later period could possibly produce a great, or even a fine, book that resembled it; for time breaks every mould. *Richard Carvel* is by far the better of the two American novels which I have mentioned; and what one feels about *Richard Carvel* is that it is the work of a man who kept a bust of Thackeray over a bookcase crowded with eighteenth-century literature, and wrote with one eye on this, and the other (perhaps unconsciously) on that airy, fairy creature known in the States as "the *matinée* girl," forgetting that he, even Mr Winston Churchill, ought to have a personality. Mr Churchill has learned everything about his craft, except the two things which cannot be taught—the art of *seeing* and the art of being one's self.

He is like a painter who looks only at pictures, and then, piecing this with that, and that with another, confects an enormous canvas without once leaving the gallery. He is not himself—artistically, he has no self—but rather the impersonal automatic result of a century of gradual decadence from one supreme exemplar. In *Richard Carvel* every primary tint is lost, every sharp relief smoothed down. The conventions which formerly had a significance and an aim properly related to the stage of art which evolved them, have been tightened instead of eased, until they become meaningless, arbitrary, and tiresome. The heroine with her peerless beauty, her royal tantrums, her feminine absolutism, her secret, her hidden devotion, her ultimate surrender; the hero of six-foot-three, with his physical supremacy, his impetuosities, his careful impromptus of wit, his amazing combinations of Machiavellian skill with asinine fatuity, his habit of looking foolish in the presence of the proud fair, and his sickening false modesty in relating his own wondrous exploits: the secondary heroine, pretty, too, but with a lower charm, meek, steadfast, with a mission "to fatten household sinners"; the transparent villain who could not deceive a cow, but who

deceives all save the hero; the "first old gentleman"; the faithful friend; the boon companions; the body servant: all these types, dressed with archæological accuracy, perform at Mr Churchill's prompting all the usual manœuvres with all the usual phrases and gestures. Who does not know that speech of the heroine's ending: "And so, sir, you are very tiresome," to which the hero must perforce reply, "ruefully"; or that critical moment, half-way through the narrative when a few words, which if spoken would end the story on the next page, are interrupted in the nick of time—"Alas, for the exits and entrances of life! Here comes the footman"; or that astronomical phenomenon — "The light had gone out of the sky"; or that solitary wild outburst of my lady—"Her breath came fast, and mine, as she laid a hand upon my arm, 'Richard, I do not care whether you are poor. What am I saying?' she cried wildly. 'Am I false to my own father?'"

Let it not be thought, however, that there is no merit in *Richard Carvel*, or in the more saucy *Janice Meredith*. What these authors, neither of them apparently with any strictly literary culture, could do, that they have done. In the

case of Mr Churchill particularly, one cannot fail to perceive laborious care, a certain moral elevation, and an admirable sense of dignity. He has been satisfied with nothing less than his best. His style may be a beach pebble among gems, but it is polished. He may not be a student of character, but he knows his eighteenth century; he is a giant of documentation, and the mere factual basis of his descriptions of eighteenth-century life in America and England is almost incredibly elaborate, and decidedly effective; whether he is giving you the interior of Brooks's or a naval battle with Paul Jones in it, he reconstructs the scene to the last limit of research. His historical portraits, including those of Fox, Walpole, Garrick, and Washington, are as brilliant and hard and exact as the exercises of a court painter. He can plan out a work, arranging the disposition of its parts, and handling vast masses of detail with the manipulative skill of a transport officer. He knows when dialogue should be used, and when narration; how to give substance to a chapter, and theatrical ornament to an episode; when the reader will best appreciate a diversion from the main theme, and when the device of monotony will build up a pleasing tension. He is the type

of artist who takes the Prix de Rome by dint of sheer mathematical calculation. And withal, there is no breath of imaginative life in him. He could no more avoid being tedious, profoundly and entirely tedious, than he could add a cubit to his stature.

II

America is a land of crazes. In other words, it is simple: no derision is implied. Examine the legal codes of the States and you will be astonished at the ingenuousness even of Illinois, which contains Chicago. A great nation which regards legislation as the villager regards a quack medicine—the cure for any and every irregularity—is necessarily eager, impressionable, sensitive. And what is true of its attitude towards morals, and those social customs which are a little less than morals, must also be true of its attitude towards the arts, and literature in particular; the two attitudes are really one. There is another reason why the artistic interests of America should be characterised by crude and violent enthusiasms. Among peoples, America is barely out of its infancy.

It has been busy in the making of its traditions; for traditions must precede art. Only of late, as a nation and in regard to art, has it begun to "take notice." And it takes notice of art, as it does everything else—even to ascending in a lift, vehemently, passionately. Every bookish person has indulgently observed the artless absorption and surrender with which a "man of action" reads when by chance a book captures him, his temporary monomania, his insistence that the bookish person shall share his joy, and his impatience at any exhibition of indifference. For the moment the terrible man of action is a child again; he who has straddled the world is like a provincial walking with open-mouthed delight through the streets of the capital. Such is America. "Next week she will go into water-colours!" exclaimed a proud mother, showing her daughter's Alpine scene in charcoal. America has "gone into" literature. Witness the culture clubs which flourish in every village. These culture clubs have been the theme of much scornful laughter, not only here, but in the eastern cities of the States—laughter, however, which recoils upon itself; for the energy of which they are one manifestation, though always naive and often blind

and sometimes pathetically stultifying itself, is sincere, and will soon enough acquire *savoir faire* and discretion.

And America is also a land of sentimentalism. It is this deep-seated quality which, perhaps, accounts for the vogue of history in American fiction. The themes of the historical novel are so remote, ideas about them exist so nebulously in the mind, that a writer may safely use the most bare-faced distortions to pamper the fancy without offending that natural and racial shrewdness which would bestir itself if a means of verification were at hand. The extraordinary notion still obtains that human nature was different "in those days"; that the good old times were, somehow, "pretty," and governed by fates poetically just. Enquiry would, of course, dissipate this notion, but no one wants to dissipate it; so long as it remains there is at any rate some excuse for those excesses of prettiness, that luxuriant sentimentality, that persistent statement of life in terms of the Christmas number, which are the fundamental secret of the success of novels like *Richard Carvel* and *Janice Meredith*. There are, of course, other factors special to America which have their share in the dazzling result. One

is the pride of the nation in its brief traditions. Shall not he who ministers to this pride be rewarded? It would be strange, indeed, if he were not. When a man hears that his name is in the newspaper he buys the newspaper, and a long time will elapse before he loses the habit. So it is with America. We, with a thousand thrilling years behind us, can scarcely understand the preoccupation of America with her Revolution and her Civil War. But why not? I say that the trait is as charming as the disturbance of a young girl after her first ball. We must not forget that though America was born old, the experiences of youth are nevertheless imposed upon her.

Another factor is the unique position and influence of young women in the United States. We are told that it is the women who rule the libraries in England; much more is it the women who rule the libraries in America. And if you would know what sort of an intellectual creature the American woman is, what a curious mixture of earnest and gay, ardent and frivolous, splendid and absurd, read her especial organ, *The Ladies' Home Journal* of Philadelphia, which is one of the most brilliantly edited papers in the world, and has a circulation of

over 800,000 copies a month. Here, in this glowing and piquant miscellany, where religion runs column by column with modes and etiquette, and the most famous English-writing authors are elbowed by the Tuppers and Friswells of New England, you will discern at large the true nature of Mr C. D. Gibson's girl—the width of her curiosity, the consuming fire of her energy, her strange knowledge and her stranger ignorances, her fineness and crudity, her imperial mien and her simple adorations. It is fitting to remark of the American woman that she has a magnificent future. In the meantime she cannot gainsay her *Ladies' Home Journal*, which stands as absolutely irrefutable evidence both for and against her. She is there in its pages, utterly revealed—the woman of the culture clubs, the woman who wistfully admires the profiles of star-actors at matinées, the woman from whom Paderewski, at the Chicago Auditorium, has to be rescued by the police, the Madonna of the home, the cherisher of aspirations, the desire of men. It is she who reads and propagates *Richard Carvel* and *Janice Meredith*, artlessly enjoying the sugar of them, made oblivious of their tedium by her sincere eagerness to "get instruction"

from them, to treat them as "serious" works—not as "ordinary novels."

Passing over various other considerations incident to the vast problem of national psychology which I have attempted briefly to survey, I will conclude with one explanatory word. There are far better historical novels in America than the two mentioned. The best taste in America esteems *Richard Carvel* and *Janice Meredith* as the best taste esteems them here. The interest of these novels lies in the clue which they afford to the secrets of a whole people's individuality. For it is not those who read but those who (speaking broadly) do not read that make a book popular. The former are few, the latter a multitude. The former we know familiarly; the ways of the latter are as fascinating, as mystifying, as the ways of children.

Mr James Lane Allen

XIV

Mr James Lane Allen

When a book attains a large circulation one usually says that it succeeds. But the fine books succeed of themselves, by their own virtue, and apart from the acclamatory noises of fame. Immure them in cabinets, cast them into Sahara: still they imperturbably succeed. If on a rare occasion such a book sells by scores of thousands, it is not the book but the public which succeeds; it is not the book but the public which has emerged splendidly from a trial. Look at this following passage, and say whether the author or his readers are the more to be congratulated on the fact that the book containing it has met with wide popular acceptance:

> Poor old schoolhouse, long since become scattered ashes! Poor little backwoods academicians, driven in about sunrise, driven out towards dusk! Poor little tired backs with nothing to lean against! Poor little bare feet that could never reach the floor! Poor little droop-headed figures, so

sleepy in the long summer days, so afraid to fall asleep! Long, long since, little children of the past, your backs have become straight enough, measured on the same cool bed; sooner or later your feet, wherever wandering, have found their resting-places in the soft earth; and all your drooping heads have gone to sleep on the same dreamless pillow and there are sleeping. And the young schoolmaster, who seemed exempt from frailty while he guarded like a sentinel that lone outpost of the alphabet—he, too, has long since joined the choir invisible of the immortal dead. But there is something left of him though more than a century has passed away: something that has wandered far down the course of time to us like the faint summer fragrance of a young tree long since fallen dead in its wintered forest, like a dim radiance yet travelling onward into space from an orb turned black and cold, like an old melody surviving on and on in the air without any instrument, without any strings.

A fine book is above the populace; if the populace reaches up to it let us praise the populace. Mr Allen's novel, *The Choir Invisible*, has been bought in America to the extent of two hundred thousand copies. America has succeeded brilliantly; America has, in fact, surpassed England, even assuming that her population is twice ours, for no book of equal merit with Mr Allen's ever had half such a welcome from ourselves—that is to say, within a similar period of time. The phenomenon of

that two hundred thousand must give pause to the facile generalisations of those who are saddened and disgusted by the triumph of mitigated rubbish. It must tend to reinstate the public in the artist's esteem, to correct an undue pessimism, and to establish a sane and proper belief in the "ultimate decency" of the average man. What, despised average man, you like *this*, you pay a dollar and a half for *this*! Miracles, then, have not ceased! . . . But why should the thing be a miracle? Say, not that miracles have not ceased, but that they have never begun. The two hundred thousand which aspired to *The Choir Invisible* did not aspire by chance. They, and perhaps two hundred thousand more, are always alert, longing, anxious to appreciate and ascend towards some nobility above them. Not all nobility is for their eyes, but when their eyes see their hearts are lifted. And let no one think that these phrases are inappropriate here.

The Choir Invisible, like Mr Allen's latest novel, *The Increasing Purpose*, is the story of a superb moral struggle; and the action of both books passes chiefly amid rural scenes, close to the earth and to the calm, uncomplaining beasts of the field. Mr Allen is the

novelist of Kentucky. In reading him one is made conscious of the fact that the United States is not a single country, but several. Kentucky, with its glorious grass, its ancient homesteads and hospitality, its Roman delight in fine roads; Kentucky, which with a population of two millions has only one town of over five thousand inhabitants, seems as unlike the America of our imagination as old middle England itself. Indeed, it is a true offshoot of old England, descended by way of Virginia. And one has a comfortable suspicion that this, and not roaring New York nor Chicago affronting the skies, is the real, valid America. In all Mr Allen's work you will find two governing ideas, the idea of the beauty of the earth, and the idea of the moral grandeur of human nature. These ideas monopolise his imagination. He does not wilfully ignore ugliness and meanness, nor seek dishonestly to hide them—he has no time to attend to them, being otherwise busy. In *The Choir Invisible* we have a picture of Kentucky while Washington was yet alive. It was less civilised then and less tamed, but more colossal in its solitudes, and not less lovely. The book is a series of rhapsodies upon Kentuckian earth. In such an amphi-

theatre Mr Allen places two human beings whose moral strength and moral beauty make them truly heroic — John Gray, the young schoolmaster, and Jessica Falconer, a great lady married to a gentleman-farmer. These two fall in love: that is all the tragedy. Jessica is Mr Allen's finest achievement. He has lavished upon her the supreme efforts of an imagination which by instinct turns women into angels. When John Gray, in a valedictory sermon, exhorts his schoolboys to mend their ways, he adds: "As for my little girls, they are good enough as they are." That is the voice of Mr Allen. As for Jessica, who, by the way, is thirty-eight, her purity is almost passionate; yet she is warm-blooded, she has sex. She might be a composite of Gautier's de Maupin and one of Christina Rossetti's nuns. High above John Gray and everyone else, she exists as an embodied ideal. The schoolmaster is desolated by his terrible struggles against temptation; but she, victimised by a love perhaps more consuming than his own, knows neither hesitancy nor fear. Fate has no stroke which she cannot bear in dignity and grace, and with inimitable fortitude she draws even from the final disaster a consolation. Jessica

is a woman to rouse one's enthusiasm; certainly, she roused her author's; his sympathy with her is so constant, so intense, so righteous, and so intimate, that no other could hope to match it; one feels that he alone of all men will ever fully appreciate Jessica.

The cause of the popularity of *The Choir Invisible* is apparent. The book is the expression of a temperament at once kindly, profound, and simple, but, above all, simple—a temperament which, while absorbing modern ideas, has retained the charm of ancient ways. Mr Allen is an ingenuous writer. In technique he has some of the quaint, surprising simplicity of Balzac. No considerations of literary custom, no narrow regard for a superficial realism, will prevent him from arriving in the directest manner that occurs to him. He cares little for the trickeries of the expert penman. In none of his books is there, perhaps, anything so extraordinarily bold as the treatise on Swedenborg in Balzac's *Seraphita*; but again and again Mr Allen abandons his narrative entirely in order to discourse, or make his persons discourse, on some moral point, the exposition of which may assist him in the business of characterisation. Note that it is always a moral

point. Here we are concerned with morals; the question is invariably of right-doing or wrong-doing; God and Conscience command the scene. And poor Humanity, rendered grandiose by Mr Allen's large and sublime trust in the soul, makes a brave show. That is the inmost secret. Can you not see the two hundred thousand, reassured by Mr Allen's simplicity, strengthened by his faith, charmed by his fine chivalry to women—can you not see them, now, watching with intent and content faces the mighty struggle of John and Jessica against themselves and circumstance, confident of the result, and deriving from the spectacle a personal stimulus and complacency? "If this is human nature," they muse, "then we are not so bad after all." (And we are not.) Long-dormant impulses are reawakened, forgotten purposes remembered, and for a time the world runs better because of Mr Allen. Æsthetically, *The Choir Invisible* reaches a high standard. Imperfect it is, but it is noble —nobly conceived, nobly imagined, and nobly written. Its imperfection is due partly to Mr Allen's lack of fertility and skill in the invention of incident, but more to a general looseness and inconsequence of construction.

To borrow the terms of music, Mr Allen seems to have been satisfied with the fantasia form when he should have used that of the sonata.

In these technical respects, *The Increasing Purpose* is an improvement upon *The Choir Invisible*, but the later book has scarcely the rich glow of its forerunner. The hero of *The Increasing Purpose* is the son of a poor, old-fashioned, narrow-minded Kentucky yeoman, who after exasperating hardships reached college, intending to become a minister; but there he found Darwin, and losing his faith in any dogmatic creed was expelled from *Alma Mater*. David's tragic return home—"*I always knew there was nothing in you*," was his father's bitter sentence—is magnificently done; and the description of his subsequent life on the farm discloses Mr Allen's feeling for nature and animals at its most intimate and most admirable. The weak portion of the book is the last, where David falls in love with a delightful schoolmistress, and so recoups himself for previous loss of happiness. These scenes appear to be over-subtilised, and decidedly they fail in original imaginative power. There is, moreover, too much clever chatter (I hesi-

tate to say that it is devised *ad captandum vulgus*) about men and women. For example:

"'I may do very well with science, but I am not so sure about women.'

"'Aren't women science?'

"'They are a branch of theology,' he said; 'they are what a man thinks about when he begins to probe his Destiny.'"

Mr Allen might well leave mere cleverness to the merely clever, resting content with the simplicity of his own individual genius. Now there is a book — or, rather, there are two books making one — which seem to me to be more personally and specially Mr Allen's than even *The Choir Invisible*, and which, preceding that novel in date of composition, constitute the most perfect work he has yet accomplished, if not the biggest. I refer to *A Kentucky Cardinal* and its sequel, *Aftermath*. Mr Allen has here set down, in quasi-diary form, the ideas and sensations of a nature-lover, who was for a time snatched away from nature by an angelic woman, and who returned to nature saddened and ennobled by the catastrophe of that woman's death. The story is not conceived in the grand manner of *The Choir Invisible*; it is smaller, less considerable,

but in achievement it is exquisite: its wit, its humour, its wisdom, and its tenderness must surely be among the best that ever came out of America. It is a radiant and marvellous little work, and from the playfulness of the opening to the austere, sweet melancholy of the close it entrances and enchants. It may never be popular, but more than anything else it will help to sustain Mr Allen's reputation with those few upon whose decision his reputation must ultimately depend.

"David Harum"

XV

"David Harum"

THE name of Noyes Westcott bears no significance in England. Even the careful student of literary organs, the man who can follow intelligently the allusiveness of our most encyclopædic *chroniqueurs*, would scarcely recognise it. But in America this banker, who began to write at the age of fifty and finished his first book on his death-bed, is universally famous as the author of a novel whose success is likely to eclipse even that of *Trilby*. Some two hundred and fifty thousand copies of *David Harum* were sold within a year. In England such a record would be impossible for any work appealing, as *David Harum* certainly does, to what it is convenient to term the educated classes, the classes which support the best magazines. In the United States, that *riesenheim*, though all things are possible there, a like phenomenon cannot occur more than a few times in a century. To convey a just idea of its singularity is difficult, for the

meaning of figures may not be conveyed by words. In literature the phrase "a quarter of a million" is a phrase merely, as a "billion" is a phrase in geology. To grasp it comparisons must be used. Let us observe that as many copies of *David Harum* were bought in a couple of months as of, say, *The Jungle Book*, in five years.

If *David Harum* contains any surprise it is not that the public should be so easily pleased, but that an amateur of letters should have been able to produce such good work, and that such good work should be so widely appreciated. To praise a book whose last chapters were penned by a dying hand is to lay one's self open to a charge of amiability. Nevertheless, I must state that *David Harum*, as to the greater portion of it, is very nearly a fine novel. The fastidious might read that portion without offence. And if a man, having read it, asserted that he had found no pleasure in it, I would roundly accuse him of affectation — unless he happened to be Mr W. B. Yeats or Mr George Moore. Decidedly the book is not more amateurish than the average good novel. In construction you may say it is weak; but you must say exactly the same of *The Vicar of Wake-*

field. As regards composition—the word "style" is a word not to be used here—it is above the ordinary. The author handles a sufficient vocabulary with sufficient freshness, and he is adroit in the turn of sentences. Beyond a few *clichés*—such as "perform his ablutions," "produce a cigar," "modest potations"—the writing has no faults except negative faults, while it possesses the somewhat rare virtues of simplicity, clearness, and rectitude. In that all-pervading neatness, that technical jugglery, and that skilled endeavour to "get the last ounce out of" a given talent, which mark the work of practised artificers, such as Mr Richard Harding Davis or (to mount higher) M. François Coppée, *David Harum* falls short, necessarily. On the other hand, there is accomplished in it what M. Coppée or Mr Davis could never accomplish—namely, a living, authentic figure of a man, which masterfully imposes itself upon the reader. Noyes Westcott may have been an everyday person, which is to say a non-spiritual person, seeing what he saw with everyday eyes; he may have been heedless of the subtler manifestations of beauty; he may not have discovered with de Maupassant that words have souls, or with Flaubert that sentiment is the devil. *David*

Harum remains—*David Harum* will probably remain for some years—a convincing and delightful creation, and, in the sense that it sticks in the memory, a memorable one.

Though he is a mere beholder of such direct action as the novel contains, David actually constitutes the whole book. He is the book. Without him there is nothing, unless it be his sister and housekeeper, old Mrs Bixbee, who is really part and parcel of him—his necessary complement. I have called him a creation. The charm of the character-drawing in a work of fiction may lie in the manner of revealing a familiar type, or it may lie in the native originality and attractiveness of the character presented. In the first case the reader's pleasure is æsthetic; in the second it is partly æsthetic and partly "of the human heart," in varying proportions. In the first place the author's achievement is chiefly a portrait; in the second it is chiefly a creation, though here also (some authors are lucky) it may be chiefly a portrait. Whether Noyes Westcott found David Harum or created him I do not know. Nor is the fact so important as it may seem, since fiction is more properly concerned with the full revelation of normal than with the creation of unusual

types (else were Dickens the greatest of all novelists). The important fact is that David Harum, the character presented, has, apart from any art or skill of presenting, an extraordinary fascination and delectability, and that the success of the book is less literary than something else—call it a success of humanity.

David Harum, the rustic banker of Homeville, in New York State, has many qualities. As a banker, of course, he is gifted with shrewdness; but his genius for mercantile transactions, surpassing that of a banker, rises to that of a horse-dealer. Banking was his vocation, horse-dealing his recreation—a recreation at once exciting and profitable. Horse-dealing gave scope for those other gifts of wit, humour, and retort which he possessed to such a remarkable degree. In effective retort he never failed. When taxed with attempting to buy a horse on the Sabbath, he replied: "The better day the better the deal." That was a fair sample of his deadly impromptus. Really literate, he delighted, as many literate people do, to use the most outrageous dialect, the most monstrous slang. If a young lady pleases him, he expresses his appreciation thus: "That girl o' your'n, if you don't mind my sayin' it, comes

as near bein' a full team an' a cross dog under the wagin as you c'n git." Nearly the whole of his talk is stable slang of an inspired kind; and the invariable humour of his reminiscences often serves to disguise, or to distract attention from, his superbly dishonest attitude in a horse-bargain. Within the bank his uprightness was unquestioned. On the road or in the stable yard he abandoned all codes save his own, for he regarded horse dealing as an affair set apart—the one unique thing lying outside the scope of the Commandments.

"A hoss trade ain't like anythin' else. A feller may be straighter 'n a string in ev'rythin' else, an' never tell the truth—that is, the hull truth—about a hoss. I trade hosses with hoss-traders. They all think they know as much as I do, an' I dunno but what they do. They hain't learnt no diff'rent anyway, an' they've had chances enough. If a feller come to me that didn't think he knowed anythin' about a hoss, an' wanted to buy on the square, he'd git, fur's I knew, square treatment. At any rate, I'd tell him all 't I knew. But when one o' them smart Alecks comes along and cal'lates to do up old Dave, why he's got to take his chances, that's all."

Here is a philosophy which will bring comfort to the man of business; for the man of business, even in the very daily act of deceit, will never yield up the conviction that after all, at bottom,

he is crystal honest. It is his darling delusion; and this witty justification, with its touching exemption, must inevitably flatter and reassure him. The man of business is grateful for such a service, and I cannot help thinking that *David Harum* must have found a special public in the occupiers of office chairs. Women are the chief novel readers, and they care neither for slang nor for the details of commerce. It is possible, therefore, that the book has run about in unaccustomed channels—in zones where fiction is wont to be despised. Certainly, Mr Harum's mercantile sagacity and *aplomb*, his unscrupulous smartness, his "no-nonsense" tone, his strange and picturesque verbiage, his assumed horror of sentiment and closely-hid kindness of heart, the secret ecstasy with which he performs a good action, would appeal with peculiar force to the man of business. Moreover, every man of business is interested in horses. If he does not drive, it is his ambition to drive. *David Harum*, however, is not, as many paragraphers have loosely stated, a mere collection of horse stories. A few are told at the beginning of the book, but they cease at page 21, and then there is no semblance of a horse story till page 228. The middle and larger part of the book, since there

is very little direct action except at the beginning and the end, consists of David's gossip about the past—talk so miscellaneous as to indicate plainly that the author was several times at a loss how to impel forward a plot which obstinately refused to make progress of its own accord. Much of this reminiscence is, in essence, extremely sentimental. Indeed, after its humour and half-cynic wit, the book is most remarkable for its sentimentality. Sixty pages are given to the recital of a Christmas Day saturated with "seasonableness"; of these sixty, twenty describe the dinner. And the episode of David's magnificent requital to the widow of the man who had taken him, as a tattered starving boy, to the local circus and filled him up with gingerbread, is a vast orgy of sentiment—delicately served, be it said. This episode, quite the best-imagined thing in the novel, must have had much to do with its popularity.

When we leave David Harum, who is the spectator of the story, and come to the story itself, we find that Noyes Westcott has merely imitated, but imitated very well, the latest fashion in novels of American society. There are a dozen regular contributors to *Harper's*, the *Century*, and the *Ladies' Home Journal*

capable of recording the courtship of John Lenox precisely as Westcott has recorded it. No doubt this fact has steadied the book, adding respectability to its credentials, and preserved it from the risks incident to entire newness. Howells, Davis, and Sara Jeannette Duncan: mix them, and you will obtain at once that atmosphere of luxury, correctness, cosmopolitanism, *badinage*, and nicely tempered passion which is served out by the great American publishing firms at the beginning of every month. They are marvellous alike, these unexceptionable tales: Fifth Avenue, Italy, saloon deck of the *Oceanic* — and the atmosphere: there you have it. As in a thousand others, so in *David Harum*. Mr Lenox is the son of a rich father, and on the Atlantic he meets Miss Blake, a girl of independent fortune, travelling with her married sister, and the latter's husband. The pair mutually attract. Mr Lenox loses his father by suicide, and then discovers that he owns only a few dollars and some valueless land in Pennsylvania (never forget that land). By the machinery of an undelivered letter the two are separated. Mr Lenox goes under—to the employ of Harum at Homeville. He is the very exemplar of bank clerks: he

saves, buys books and a piano, instructs the church choir, and sings with taste for the diversion of evening parties — all this while David Harum is gradually unfolding David Harum's delightful personality. In the end Mr Lenox, having become a partner in the bank, departs to Europe for his health. The girl is on the steamer. Mr Lenox examines the passenger list, and decided that Miss Blake has become Mrs Ruggles. Desolated, he calls her Mrs Ruggles, and in obedience to an inexorable law of fiction she accepts the name. But, of course, after the lapse of the due number of weeks and pages, the misunderstanding — so ineffably stale, feeble, and futile—is set right. Miss Blake is still Miss Blake, and willing to plight her troth. Only one thing remains— the cable from David that he has sold the land in Pennsylvania for a hundred thousand dollars. In extenuation of the author it must be stated that this narrative is compressed into eighty pages at the beginning, and twenty pages at the end of the book. The rest is pure Harum.

In England *David Harum* has aroused comparatively only a moderate interest. Novels which excite America seldom or never meet with anything but indifference here. The

reason usually is, either that they are imitations (a little weak, but wholly unashamed) of styles distinctively English (this applies especially to historical novels), or that they are quite beneath our standard, American taste being as yet behind our own. But neither of these charges can be enforced against *David Harum.* It owes nothing to English models; and it is at once capable and modest, certainly superior to several conspicuous English successes of its year. Why, then, should it not have succeeded in this country as it succeeded in America? The answer is not forthcoming. The main causes operating against success were, perhaps, extremely subtle in character, scarcely to be seized without doubt. The "society" part of the book, while helping it in America, would hinder it in England, but not, I think, seriously. The explanation lies elsewhere. Of one thing I am convinced, that David Harum himself would have enchanted these isles if he had been properly introduced to them. There, possibly, is the point. Much depends on the hundred minor circumstances of introduction, each trivial alone, but so vital together. Had Noyes Westcott been known to us, had he been fortunately "discovered" in the right quarters,

had his book been nicely heralded, had it been backed by a sufficient moral force, had fifty little things happened—then the fame of *David Harum* might have resounded through the country. But Chance willed differently, and Chance is a power in popular literature, just as in the other sort of literature she is negligible.

Mr George Gissing

XVI

Mr George Gissing

The sound reputation of an artist is originally due never to the public, but to the critics. I do not use the word "critic" in a limited, journalistic sense; it is meant to include all those persons, whether scribes or not, who have genuine convictions about an art. The critic's first requisite is that he should be interested. A man may have an instinctive good taste; but if his attitude is one of apathy then he is not a true critic. The opinions of the public are often wrong; the opinions of the critics are usually right. But the fundamental difference between these two bodies does not lie here: it lies in the fact that the critics "care," while the public does not care. The public, by its casual approval, may give notoriety and a vogue which passes; but it is incapable of the sustained ardour of appreciation which alone results in authentic renown. It is incapable because it is nonchalant. To the

public art is a very little thing—a distraction, the last resort against *ennui.* To the critics art looms enormous. They do not merely possess views; they are possessed by them. Their views amount to a creed, and that creed must be spread. Quiescence is torment to the devotee. He cannot cry peace when there is no peace. Passionate conviction, like murder, will out. "I believe; therefore you must believe:" that is the motto which moves the world. Keats writes an ode: the critics read it; they are on fire; each is instantly transformed into a missionary. The wide earth must know of that ode; the sky must ring with it. And so the missionaries go forth. "Can you not see it, O public? You must see it. You have got to see it. Here is a great ode!" And after thirty-and-three years the public mildly inquires: "What is all this noise about Keats?" And it buys the ode prettily bound, and regards it with a *moue*, and admits—partly for the sake of quietness, partly from a sense of propriety, and just a little bit from honest liking—that the thing is a masterpiece. So, by vehement insistence, by unwearied harping, the reputation of Keats is made and kept alive. What applies to Keats applies sometime to all artists, of whatever shade

or degree. Even if the public happens to begin by acclaiming an artist, he must nevertheless come to the critics for that consolidating warmth of esteem, that *quasi*-religious devotion, without which there is no permanent security. It may be early, it may be late—the moment surely arrives when, but for the critics, the artist would fall into that neglect which is death. Byron needed no missionaries for half a century; but he needs them now. Keats could not have lived a week without those apostles of the faith.

And neither, to approach the subject at last, could Mr George Gissing. The author of *Demos* enjoys a fame to-day which he certainly deserves, but which he owes to the critics exclusively. His novels contain less of potential popularity than those of almost any other living novelist of rank. They have neither the prettiness which pleases, nor the outward beauty which subdues, nor the wit which dazzles, nor the thematic bigness which overawes. And they are not soiled by any specious lower qualities which might have deceived an innocent public into admiration. There is nothing in them to attract, and much to repel, the general gaze. A West End bookseller and the proprietor of a circulating library said to me: "My ordinary

public will have none of Gissing. But I stock his novels. They have a steady, very slow sale. I can tell my 'Gissing' customers at a glance. They may be divided into two classes, the literary and the earnest. By 'earnest' I mean interested in social problems. As for other sorts of people—no, not at all. You see, his subjects are so unattractive. My ordinary public simply doesn't care to read about that kind of thing." Thus the observant bookseller. Yet Mr Gissing is renowned. He stands for something. His words have authority, and his name carries respect even among "my ordinary public," which will not buy him. He figures often in the magazines, and I have small doubt that he receives higher prices for serial rights than many authors whose editions far outnumber his own. The fact is, he has that peculiar moral significance and weight which exist apart from mere numerical popularity, and which yet have an assessable value in the commercial market. "My ordinary public" may be conceived as saying to him: "We often hear of you. We take you for a serious person of high motives. We are told you are rather fine, but we don't realise it ourselves; to us you are very grey and depressing. We

prefer to be more cheerful. Still, we suppose there really is something in you, and, since we have heard so much about you, we shall probably look at anything of yours that we may happen to see in the monthlies. In the meantime we leave your books to those who care for them."

It is, of course, just this "grey" quality of his subjects, so repellent to the public, which specially recommends Mr Gissing's work to the critics. The artists who have courage fully to exploit their own temperaments are always sufficiently infrequent to be peculiarly noticeable and welcome. Still more rare are they who, leaving it to others to sing and emphasize the ideal and obvious beauties which all can in some measure see, will exclusively exercise the artist's prerogative as an explorer of hidden and recondite beauty in unsuspected places. Beauty is strangely various. There is the beauty of light and joy and strength exulting; but there is also the beauty of shade, of sorrow and sadness, and of humility oppressed. The spirit of the sublime dwells not only in the high and remote; it shines unperceived amid all the usual meannesses of our daily existence. To take the common grey things which people know and

despise, and, without tampering, to disclose their epic significance, their essential grandeur—that is realism, as distinguished from idealism or romanticism. It may scarcely be, it probably is not, the greatest art of all; but it is art, precious and indisputable. Such art has Mr Gissing accomplished. In *The Nether World*, his most characteristic book, the myriad squalid futilities of an industrial quarter of London are gathered up into a large coherent movement of which the sinister and pathetic beauty is but too stringently apparent. After *The Nether World* Clerkenwell is no longer negligible. It has import. You feel the sullen and terrible pulse of this universe which lies beneath your own. You may even envy the blessedness of the meek, and perceive in the lassitude of the heavy laden a secret grace that can never be yours. Sometimes, by a single sentence, Mr Gissing will evoke from the most obscure phenomena a large and ominous idea. The time is six o'clock, and the workshops are emptying. He says: "It was the hour of the unyoking of men." A simple enough phrase, but it lends colour to the aspect of a whole quarter, and fills the soul with a vague, beautiful sense of sympathetic trouble. This is a good

example of Mr Gissing's faculty of poetical constructive observation—a faculty which in his case is at once a strength and a weakness. He sees the world not bit by bit—a series of isolations—but broadly, in vast wholes. He will not confine himself to a unit, whether of the individual or the family. He must have a plurality, working in and out, mutually influencing, as it were seething. So he obtains an elaborate and complicated reflection of the variety and confusion of life, impossible to be got in any other way. So also by grouping similar facts he multiplies their significance into something which cannot be ignored. That is his strength. His weakness is that he seems never to be able to centralise the interest. His pictures have no cynosure for the eye. The defect is apparent in nearly all his books, from *The Unclassed*, a youthful but remarkable work, wherein several narratives are connected by a chain of crude coincidences, down to the *Crown of Life*, his penultimate novel, of which the story loses itself periodically in a maze of episodes each interrupting the others. Out of the fine welter of *The Nether World* nothing emerges paramount. There are a dozen wistful tragedies in this one novel, of which the canvas

is as large as that of *Anna Karenina*—a dozen exquisite and moving renunciations with their accompanying brutalities and horror; but the dark grandeur which ought to have resulted from such an accumulation of effects is weakened by a too impartial diffusion of the author's imaginative power.

I have said that *The Nether World* is Mr Gissing's most characteristic book. It is not, however, his best. In *Demos*, which preceded it by three years (appearing in 1886), the cardinal error of the latter work is avoided. *Demos* may be esteemed an unqualified success. The canvas is enormous, the characters a multitude, but as the narrative progresses it becomes, instead of a story of socialism as Mr Gissing intended, the story of one woman. The figure of Adela Mutimer—a girl of race married by the wish of her family to an artisan—monopolises more and more the reader's anxiety, until the question of her happiness or misery dwarfs all else. Adela is Mr Gissing's finest and loveliest creation, and the great scene in which she compels her husband to desist from a crime that could never have been discovered is unmatched in sheer force and conviction by any other in his work. It is, in truth, masterly. *Demos* has

another point of particular interest in that the plot turns chiefly upon the differences which separate class from class. Many novelists have dealt with the consequences of a marriage between persons of unequal birth, but none has brought to the consideration of the matter that wide and exact documentary knowledge of caste and that broad outlook which mark Mr Gissing's conception. His philosophy seems to be that social distinctions have a profounder influence upon the general human destiny than is commonly thought. The tendency of men of wide sympathies among all grades is to insist on a fundamental similarity underlying the superficial dissimilarity of those grades; but Mr Gissing by no means accepts the idealistic theory that "the rank is but the guinea stamp" and "a man's a man for a' that." He may almost be said to be obsessed by social distinctions; he is sensitive to the most delicate *nuances* of them; and it would seem that this man, so free from the slightest trace of snobbishness, would reply, if asked what life had taught him: "The importance of social distinctions." Listen to this about Adela Mutimer and her husband:

He was not of her class, not of her world; only by a violent wrenching *of the laws of nature* had they come

together. She had spent years in trying to convince herself that . . . only an unworthy prejudice parted class from class. One moment of true insight was worth all her theorising on abstract principles. To be her equal this man must be born again. . . .

Here is the spirit which informs the whole of Mr Gissing's work. It crops out again and again in unexpected places. It is always with him. Yet he shows no aristocratic bias whatever: he holds an even balance. If he has a weakness it is for the class "created by the mania of education," consisting "of those unhappy men and women whom unspeakable cruelty endows with intellectual needs while refusing them the sustenance they are taught to crave." The words are the words of the Rev. Mr Wyvern in *Demos*, but there are many indications that they express the thoughts of George Gissing. If his heart is hardened it is against

the commercial class, . . . the supremely maleficent. They hold us at their mercy, and their mercy is nought. Monstrously hypocritical, they cry for progress when they mean increased opportunities of swelling their own purses at the expense of those they employ and of those they serve; vulgar to the core, they exalt a gross ideal of well-being, and stink in their prosperity. The very poor and the uncommercial wealthy alike suffer from them; the intellect of the country is poisoned by their influence.

Mr George Gissing

Mr Gissing has often been called a pessimist: he is not one. He paints in dark tints, for he has looked on the sum of life, and those few who have done this are well aware that life is dark; Clerkenwell is larger than Piccadilly, and Islington than Brixton. The average artist stays at home in life; Mr Gissing has travelled far, and brought back strange, troublous tales full of disturbing beauty, and he suffers for his originality. The audience is incredulous, and objects to anything which disturbs, even beauty. But Mr Gissing is not thereby constituted a pessimist; he is merely a man who can gaze without blinking; he is not soured; he has, I fancy, the marvellous belief that happiness is evenly distributed among the human race; he may sup on horrors, but he can digest them without a headache the next morning; he is neither gay nor melancholy, but just sober, calm, and proud against the gods; he has seen, he knows, he is unmoved; he defeats fate by accepting it. When Sidney Kirkwood and Jane Snowdon, both beaten and both sad, meet by the grave of Grandfather Snowdon, he leaves them thus:

To both was their work given. Unmarked, unencouraged save by their love of uprightness and mercy, they stood by

the side of those more hapless, brought some comfort to hearts less courageous than their own. Where they abode it was not all dark. Sorrow certainly awaited them, perchance defeat in even the humble aims that they had set themselves; but at least their lives would remain a protest against those brute forces of society which fill with wreck the abysses of the nether world.

This may be grievous, but it is not pessimism. The thoughtless may say that it is scarcely diverting to read after dinner; but those who can bear to reflect upon the large issues of life will be grateful that an artist of Mr Gissing's calibre has used his art so finely for the inculcation of fortitude and serenity.

Ivan Turgenev

XVII

Ivan Turgenev

THE recent completion of an English version, in fifteen volumes, of the Works of Ivan Turgenev, translated by Mrs Constance Garnett, and introduced by Mr Edward Garnett, deserves more than that passing and perfunctory notice which is usually accorded to such achievements. The decade now drawing to a close has been rather remarkable for newly translated and worthily produced editions of great foreign novelists. We have had Dumas, Balzac, Victor Hugo, Björnson, and d'Annunzio. And we have had Turgenev. But the case of the author of *Virgin Soil* differs from the rest. Dumas, Balzac, Hugo—these are names which have a very definite meaning to the public. Björnson, too, is renowned among us, and already the youthful d'Annunzio has raised a general curiosity. Translations of any of these men could be sure in advance of at least a moderate acceptance; in some instances the acceptance has amounted to enthusiasm. The

late Sergius Stepniak, in his introduction to the English translation of *Smoke* (1894), said that Turgenev, "during the last fifteen years of his life, won for himself the reading public, first in France, then in Germany and America, and finally in England." The statement is certainly not correct as regards England and America, and it is only true in a very limited sense of France and Germany. Except in Russia, Turgenev has not even to-day captured the "reading public." He has everywhere captured the men of letters; but these constitute only a fraction of "the reading public." Men of letters who happen to have genius do not write for men of letters. They write, as Wagner was proud to say he composed, for the ordinary person. From the Russian magazines Turgenev used to receive £24 a "leaf" for serial rights. When genius commands such a price it is fame; it is to "capture the reading public." Compare this vogue with the condition of affairs in England, and in France, the ultimate home of Turgenev's adoption. It is extremely improbable that any of his novels has reached a sale of 10,000 copies even in France. As for England, I do not hesitate to say that half-a-dozen years ago Turgenev was barely a name

to our "reading public." It was Tolstoi who had made the capture. The more honour, and a very special esteem, therefore, to Mrs Garnett and her colleagues in this undertaking of an approximately complete Turgenev in English. They have worthily laboured with a single eye to the cause of art. And, whatever the immediate result, they are to be vehemently congratulated upon their work. Mr Garnett's introductory essays contain much subtle and just appreciation. A complete ignorance of the Russian language prevents me from measuring the excellence of the translation, but decidedly it has the air of being faithful; it is good English, and quite apart and aloof from the ruck of translations. Stepniak, who should be an authority, said it was "as near an approach to the elegance and poetry of the original" as any he had encountered. Certainly, the same scholarship and the same enormous pains have not before been brought to an English rendering of Turgenev. It would be unfair to match it with the French translation, in fourteen volumes, published by Hetzel, Charpentier, and Hachette. The most eminent of his contemporaries were glad to help Turgenev in that translation; parts of it he did with his own

hand, and every volume had the incomparable advantage of his minute revision. No other novelist was ever translated with such literary pomp. But, circumstance for circumstance, our English edition will hold its own. We have the right to boast of it. Possibly, as volume of it succeeded volume, with but scant expression of gratitude from either Press or public, those who had it in hand may have been a little discouraged and set back. They may have imagined that their efforts were thankless; in part wasted. Not so. What they have done they have done; and it was always good in the sight of the few whose unspoken applause is above the sound of trumpets.

Any attempt to examine the relations between Turgenev and his Western publics must suffer at its very inception by the fact that in neither French nor English is there a proper biography of the man; a full account of his life, his opinions, and his methods. The Vicomte E. M. de Vogüé's essay prefixed to the *Œuvres Dernières* is masterly, but it is only an essay. Renan's funeral oration, included in the same volume, is a majestic and lovely tribute, but it is only a discourse. For the rest, there are Deline's *Tourgueneff Inconnu*, fragmentary and

mediocre; Pavlonsky's *Souvenirs sur Tourgueneff*, said to be very unreliable; the volume of letters, useful as far as it goes, edited by Halperine-Kaminsky under the title *Tourguéneff and his French Circle*; and critical studies by Paul Bourget and Ernest Dupuy. Strangely enough, Turgenev's own *Souvenirs Littéraires* are not obtainable in French. At some future date Mrs Garnett might well crown her work by adding to it a translation of these *Souvenirs*. Such extracts therefrom as may be found here and there are of the highest interest and value.

The most important event in Turgenev's career was, of course, his self-exile from Russia. He was born in 1818. Russia is a place of sorrow for artists and thinkers to-day; it was more sorrowful then. You will get many glimpses of it in *A Sportsman's Sketches*, *First Love*, and other tales. If his mother had been sympathetic it is conceivable that he might have stayed at home. But Turgenev's mother is already notorious. The Vicomte de Vogüé points out that in Turgenev's novels all the mothers are either wicked or grotesque. We learn from the Journal of Mme. Turgenev's adopted daughter that when Ivan took home his first book—*Paracha* (1841)—"the tiny

blue-covered volume lay about mamma's room; it was never mentioned." A little incident touching this adopted daughter shows at once what manner of woman Mme. Turgenev was, and what the times were. The girl had fallen ill, and a serf-physician was ordered to attend her. "Remember," said the terrible mistress, "if you don't cure her—Siberia." Then there was the mighty censor, whose antics, performed apparently out of pure love of the ridiculous, are almost incredible. Turgenev wrote: "The young girl was a flower." In the interests of law and order the censor altered this to: "The young lady resembled a splendid rose." One can sympathise with an author's desire to put a thousand miles between himself and the mere physical presence of that official. But indeed authors have never been recognised of the powers in Russia. Turgenev told Edmond de Goncourt that at a dinner given by Count Orloff to celebrate the emancipation of the serfs, he was placed forty-seventh, after the despised priest. To catch the full beauty of this anecdote it is necessary to remember that Turgenev was then of European renown; that he was an intimate friend of the host, and that his books had helped to bring about the eman-

cipation. It was from such a land that Turgenev fled. He explains the flight thus:

For myself, I can say that I felt very keenly the disadvantages of this wrenching-away from my native soil, of this violent rupture of all the bonds which held me to the land of my youth; but there was nothing else to be done. That existence, that environment, and in particular that sphere to which I belonged—the sphere of country landowners and of serfdom—offered me no inducement to stay. On the contrary, nearly everything I saw around me awoke in me a feeling of disquiet, of revolt—to be frank, of disgust. I could not hesitate long. Either I must wholly submit, and follow the common groove, the beaten path, or I must deracinate myself at a single stroke, and get away from everyone and everything, even at the risk of losing many things dear to my heart. I chose the latter course. I plunged head first into the "German Ocean"; it purified and regenerated me; and when at length I emerged from its waters, I found myself an Occidental, and an Occidental I have always remained.

("*Voilà le gros mot lâché*," comments de Vogüé —"*Occidental.*")

It seems convincing—yet I am conscious of a desire to cry for more light upon the temperamental causes of Turgenev's exile. Other great Russian authors suffered infinitely more than he; but they stayed. And they stayed because, in spite of all, Russia was still Russia to them. Did Turgenev unconsciously anti-

cipate Ibsen, and was it the artist in him demanding equanimity in order to create that drove him out of his own country? Or was his departure due simply to a revolt of outraged sentiments? In the latter case our estimate of the man would be somewhat lowered. Whatever the truth of the matter, it appears to me quite possible that the disadvantages of his exile outweighed the advantages. This voluntary banishment certainly intensified that pervading melancholy and that inflexible reserve which have operated against the popularity of his novels among Western readers. To some extent it even interfered with his productiveness. Of Paris he once said: "It is impossible for me to work here." During the whole of his maturity he was a wanderer, without a hearth. He led a life of restaurants. He had acquaintances with whom he was on very familiar terms, and who liked and admired him immensely —the Viardots, Flaubert, de Goncourt, Daudet, and doubtless others in Germany and England— but had this pseudo-Occidental a single veritable *friend* outside Russia? Did he ever, in spite of marvellous conversational powers, so freely exercised, ever fully reveal himself to his "French circle"? For myself, I suspect not.

He was lonely, this man to whom all the most exalted doors in Western Europe were open. He continually regretted his original sacrifice. For ever haunted by obscure racial longings, he retired within himself and became a mystery. As with many talkative men, his secret thoughts were his own. What, other than Russia, were the things that lay next his heart? There was sport, we know. At the age of fifty-five he speaks, in a letter to Flaubert, of "my boundless passion for sport, the only pleasure which is left to me." He had made a definite appointment to meet Flaubert at Croisset; but "a very pleasant fellow, called Bullock" (who "possessed the finest partridge shooting in the whole of England"), had invited him to go and "kill mountains of partridges"; and though he would probably not be able to accept the invitation, there was a possibility of his doing so; therefore Flaubert must kindly postpone the appointment, on the chance. "There is something shocking," he observes, "in an old greybeard like myself crossing the sea twice in order to pour a lot of lead into a lot of partridges." As a sportsman, Turgenev certainly had the large grandiose manner of Dumas *père*. He must have been the sort of

sportsman to whom keepers, so prone to scoff, pay the homage of their sincere respect. He resembled Dumas, too, though one might easily not have suspected it, on another point: an intense predilection for the feminine. This man who was never married, remarked at Flaubert's dinner-table, when Flaubert and de Goncourt were contesting the importance of love to an author, that his existence was "saturated with femininity":

With me, neither books nor anything whatever in the world could take the place of woman. How can I make that plain to you? I find it is only love which produces a certain expansion of the being, that nothing else gives . . . eh? Listen. When quite a young man I once had a mistress, a miller's girl in the neighbourhood of St Petersburg, whom I used to see when out hunting. She was charming, very fair, with a flash of the eye rather common among us. She would accept nothing from me. But one day she said to me: "You must give me a present."

"What is it you want?"

"Bring me some scented soap from St Petersburg."

I brought her the soap. She took it, disappeared, came back blushing, and murmured, offering me her hands, delicately scented:

"Kiss my hands—like you kiss the hands of ladies in drawing-rooms at St Petersburg."

I threw myself on my knees—and, you know, *that was the finest moment of my life.*

Ivan Turgenev

We owe this *histoire* to the de Goncourt *Journal*, which from 1872 to 1883 is full of references to Turgenev. Some of the best things in that famous but untranslatable collection of curios were gathered from Turgenev. But even the all-embracing *Journal*, to which nothing came amiss, is silent or nearly so on the supreme question: Turgenev's methods of work, and the origin and growth of that consummate skill which places him in one respect above all other novelists. Guns and women: he would discuss these. What of writing, and those intimate details about actual *pen-work* which, as in the case of Stevenson, must always fascinate the admirers of a great literary artist? In eleven years Turgenev seems to have mentioned this matter to de Goncourt only once. Here is the passage:

> In order to work I must have winter, a frost such as we have in Russia, an *astringent* cold, the trees all covered with crystals, then . . . But I work still better in autumn, you know; on days when there is no wind, no wind at all, and the ground is elastic and the air has a taste of wine. My place—it is a little wooden house with a garden full of yellow acacias—we have no white acacia. In the autumn the earth is covered with pods, which crackle when you tread on them, and the air is filled with mocking-birds . . . yes, shrikes. In there, all alone. . . .

Turgeneff did not finish, but a contraction of the hands closed over his chest told us of the joy and intoxication of the brain which he experienced in that little corner of old Russia.

There is not much substance in this. A solitary passage in Pavlonsky's *Souvenirs* is rather better:

I have various plans in my head (said Turgenev), but I can do nothing; and the saddest part of it is that work is no longer a joy to me. Once I liked to work as one likes to caress a woman. I experienced a veritable pleasure in dreaming over a work or correcting it. When I was writing I wanted no society. I isolated myself on my estates. There I had a little room in the outbuildings, something like a peasant's cabin, furnished only with a deal table and a chair; and there I used to work fairly well for months at a time. Often I would carry on literary make-believes with great zest. When I was writing *Fathers and Children* I kept Bazarov's diary. If I read a new book, if I met an interesting man, if there occurred any important political or social event, I always described the thing in the diary from Bazarov's point of view. The result was a large and very curious volume. Unfortunately, I have lost it. Someone borrowed it to read and never returned it.

This is interesting, but it is like a crumb to the ravenous. The man must inevitably have had a passion for technique and all the thousand and one niceties of form. He must have spent years in the sedulous cultivation of the craftsman in himself. The author of a miracle like

On the Eve may be born, but he is also made. In the matter of condensation alone Turgenev was unique among the great literary artificers. He could say more in a chapter of two thousand words than any other novelist that ever lived. What he accomplishes again and again in a book of sixty thousand words, Tolstoi could not have accomplished under a quarter of a million. His genius for choosing the essential and discarding everything else, was simply unparalleled. What Ibsen did for European drama, Turgenev did for European fiction: he uttered the last word of pure artistry. And it is precisely of his life as a practical working novelist that we know nothing, or next to nothing.

Our information about his literary opinions is scarcely less meagre, and may be set out in a few lines. It is strange that Turgenev, whose work marks him as a hater of exaggeration in any form, was an enthusiastic admirer of Dickens. He put Dickens above Balzac, and was never tired in his praise. He did not care for the author of *Eugénie Grandet*. "Balzac," he is stated to have remarked, "is an ethnographer, not an artist." It is absurd, but there is criticism in it. Turgenev's reported adverse *dicta* about his contemporaries — Flaubert,

Daudet, de Goncourt—are probably in the main apocryphal. That his critical ideals remained fluid to the end is proved by his appreciation of de Maupassant. *La Maison Tellier* enchanted him. Among his own books he preferred *First Love*, of which he said his father was the hero. He considered that *A Sportsman's Sketches*, with certain exceptions, showed him at his weakest. There is a diversity of view as to the order of excellence in his novels. Mr Edward Garnett would possibly put *On the Eve* first, and I could not disagree with him. The Vicomte de Vogüé unhesitatingly gives the palm to *A House of Gentlefolk*. Certainly the epilogue to that book and the love scene in chapter xxxiv. are unforgetable art. Yet, when I reflect upon the mass of Turgenev's work, not these but the sketch entitled "Byezhin Prairie," in *A Sportsman's Sketches*, stands out most prominent. The picture of the pony-boys by their watch-fire discussing ghosts—their artless talk, the effect and mystery of night, the ultimate dawn and sunrise . . . when a thing is supreme there is nothing to be said.

It seems to me that there are three reasons why Turgenev, despite the unaffected and zealous support everywhere extended to him by

men of letters, should have failed to grip the public as Tolstoi and even Dostoievsky have gripped it. The first is, that as an artist he has hardly a fault; in particular, he never showed the least inclination to either flamboyance or vulgarity. He was always restrained and refined. Now the public may, and generally does, admire a great artist. But it begins (and sometimes ends) by admiring him for the wrong things. Shakespeare is more highly regarded for his philosophy than for his poetry, as the applause at any performance of "Hamlet" will prove. Balzac conquers by that untamed exuberance and those crude effects of melodrama which are the least valuable parts of him. And it is natural that people who concern themselves with art only in their leisure moments, demanding from it nothing but a temporary distraction, should prefer the obvious to the recondite, and should walk regardless of beauty unless it forces itself upon their attention by means of exaggerations and advertisement. The public wants to be struck, hit squarely in the face; then it will take notice. Most of the great artists, by chance or design, have performed that feat. But Turgenev happens not to have done so. Look through all

his work, and I doubt if you will find a scene which in the theatrical sense could be called "powerful." There is no appeal by force to the soul; no straining, no grandiloquence, no distortion; nothing but the flawless chastity of perfect art. His best books are like an antique statue, and their beauty, instead of delivering a blow, steals towards you and mildly penetrates the frame. As well expect the public to admire the Venus de Milo as to admire *On the Eve*. Refinement is mistaken for coldness, and restraint for mediocrity. And so it will ever be.

Yet Turgenev, it may be said, is popular in Russia, why not also in the West? This brings me to the second point. A work of art will sometimes triumph for reasons neither artistic nor inartistic, but by means of the moral ideals upon which it happens to be founded. Every work of art must have a moral basis, and Turgenev's novels have a moral basis beyond the ordinary. They are the muffled but supreme utterance of a nation's secret desire. But what is that to the West? The West cannot feel what Russia feels—cannot even intellectually comprehend the profound surge of emotion which barely agitates the surface of that giant's life. It is nothing

to the West, for instance, that "the chief figure of *On the Eve*, Elena, foreshadows and stands for the rise of young Russia in the sixties"; but it is everything to Russia, with her ears sensitive to catch the least echo of her own scarce-whispered aspirations. The proportion of readers who appreciate the artistic significance of Turgenev is as small in Russia as in France and England; but every literate east of the Baltic can, and does, grasp his moral significance. Here lies the difference between Turgenev and Tolstoi. Apart from his fiery vehemence, which compels attention, Tolstoi has the advantage over Turgenev in the race for popularity, because the moral basis of his work is less exclusively Russian, and nearer the universal. The inner meaning of *Anna Karenina* is plain to every country. The lessons of *War and Peace* need no searching. *The Kreutzer Sonata* would apply itself as well to Salt Lake City as to Moscow. Tolstoi speaks to humanity, Turgenev to Russia. But for all that Tolstoi is the lesser artist.

The third reason against Turgenev's general acceptance in the West is that Russia has something about her of the Orient, and that

Turgenev had the Oriental melancholy and other attributes intensified to a special degree. Far from being completely occidentalised, as he imagined, the tinge and texture of his mind never abated their original quality. Oriental he was born, and (unlike Tolstoi again) Oriental he remained. Though he preached an evangel, it was not an evangel of revolt and attack; rather an evangel of vague and quiescent hope, with dreamy eyes upon the furthest future. "Russian writers," says the Vicomte de Vogüé, "by reason as much of the circumstances in which they are placed as by the particular turn of their genius, do not openly attack; they neither argue nor declaim; they depict without arriving at a conclusion, and appeal more to pity than to anger." It is just the qualities of melancholy, inconclusiveness, and patient, inactive faith which do not commend themselves to the Western mind, comparatively so strenuous, eager, and restive under abuses. We can neither understand nor sympathise with this policy of waiting and meditation. With us to think is to act, and to act is to fight. When Uvar Ivanovitch answers the question, "Will there be men among us?" by "flourishing his fingers and

fixing his enigmatical stare into the far distance," we chafe, we get angry. We feel the need of a watchword and a battle-cry. The true Russian does not.

From such deep-seated causes Turgenev's novels fail—at any rate, partially—in their moral suasion over the Western mind. Absolute resignation we could comprehend, and open rebellion we could approve; but a sad, uneasy something between the two leaves us cold and puzzled. Turgenev, I fancy, was aware of the racial defect, and aware also that Tolstoi had it not. Perhaps it was this knowledge which caused him to send across Europe to Tolstoi that exquisite letter of farewell, one of the most pathetic and moving documents in the whole history of literature.

"Very dear Léon Nikolaievitch," the missive ran—"It is a long time since I wrote to you. I was then, and I am now, on my death-bed. I cannot recover; there is no longer the least chance of it. I am writing to you expressly to tell you how happy I have been to be your contemporary, and to make you a last urgent prayer. My friend, return to literary work. This gift has come to you from there whence everything comes to us. Ah! how happy I

should be if I could know that you would listen to my prayer! . . . My friend, great writer of our Russian land, hear my prayer. Let me know if this letter reaches you. I clasp you for the last time to my heart—you and all yours. . . . I can write no more. . . . I am tired."

Mr George Moore

XVIII

Mr George Moore

I

It was not until the publication of *Esther Waters* in 1894 that Mr George Moore received from the general public and its literary advisers the candid recognition of his eminence as a serious novelist. At that date he had been writing for sixteen years and had produced some dozen books, including—besides fiction—verse, drama, and criticism; several of these volumes had had a large and steady sale, and one of them—indubitably a masterpiece—had been translated into French; as far back as 1885 he was in a position to inform Mr Mudie (in that militant pamphlet *Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals*) that the support of the libraries was not vital to his existence as an author. But in some mysterious way the just laurels of his achievement were denied to him. The press, while witnessing faithfully enough to the extraordinary power and merit of his work, assumed an attitude of pained reproach, con-

fronted him with arguments in which recur those notorious phrases, "photographic realism," "nose in the gutter," and "true mission of art," and would on no account explicitly acknowledge his entire probity. Though this powerful and meritorious work sold freely, the respectable bookshops, instead of displaying it on the shelf of popularity, preferred to bring it forth, on demand only, from some shy corner. In compensation, to be sure, it was thrust before your gaze, along with translations of Paul de Kock, confessions of ladies'-maids, and physiological treatises, on the façades of dubious marts in Holywell Street and elsewhere; and so came to be bought at nightfall by youths who imagined that they were indulging a taste for naughtiness. In the early nineties, when Mr Moore published two volumes of essays, it began to be rumoured that he was our foremost art-critic; but none referred to his novels. Then, after a silence as regards fiction of five years, came *Esther Waters*. Its author must have felt a certain scornful embarrassment at the largesse of praise with which this book was saluted. He had abated not one of his principles; he had made no compromises, offered no apologies. On the contrary, here

were precisely the themes and precisely the methods which before had disadvantaged him to such an extent that once, in order to get printed serially, he had been compelled to use a pseudonym. Yet *Esther Waters* was called, without any sort of reservation, a *chef d'œuvre*. The most discreet critics lauded it with the whole fervour of their souls. It was discussed everywhere with open doors. Not to have read it amounted to a social solecism, and those timid discerning ones who in secretness had previously given Mr Moore his true rank, were now able to confess their belief. I am not concerned here to inquire into the causes of this strange revulsion of a prejudice. It is enough to note that owing to developments on the part of one or two writers who were fortunate enough or wise enough to establish themselves before developing, the cult of the Young Person had been for some time on the wane.

That Mr Moore is a vigorous individuality, from the first stubbornly bent upon the realisation of a revolutionary theory, need not be affirmed. Were it otherwise the opposition which he encountered had been far less acrid and less persistent. But he has never, so far as I am aware, formally enunciated his artistic

creed. *Literature at Nurse* was merely the expression of an annoyance which resolved itself into the complaint: "If I am punished, why are others who have transgressed more deeply allowed to go free?" He is not, like the brothers de Goncourt, given to *préfaces et manifestes*. And when one seeks in the history of his career for a clue to his idiosyncrasy, one discovers that his career is unpublished. Even the latest compendium of facts, which boasts of so many thousand biographies, gives nothing but the briefest bibliography of his works; other annuals of reference ignore him. Happily there appeared, first in a magazine called *Time*, now extinct, and afterwards in book form, that singularly vivacious, vivid fantasy of reminiscence, criticism, and philosophy, *The Confessions of a Young Man* (1888). In form, *The Confessions of a Young Man* is a novel, with a hero named Dayne, but one may be permitted to assume that in essence it is an autobiography. Mr Moore cares so little for the mere name of his hero that he styles him Edward or Edwin indifferently; and it is impossible to regard either the minute details of Parisian studio life or the literary criticisms in which the book abounds as other than personal to the author himself.

Mr George Moore

Dayne went to Paris as a youth, and almost became a Parisian. "The English I love, and with a love that is foolish—mad, limitless; I love them better than the French, but I am not so near to them." And again: "With Frenchmen I am conscious of a sense of nearness; I am one with them in their ideas and aspirations, and when I am with them I am alive to a keen and penetrating sense of intimacy." He sketches for us, with a frankness now gay, now cynical, the luscious *vie de Bohème* that Paris alone can offer to the young man of health and wealth whose love of art exceeds his love of virtue. Here, amid scenes splendid, squalid, or bizarre, move students, *cabotins*, painters, poets, pale enthusiasts starving for the sake of an idea, actresses, women of fashion, courtesans, clubmen, and mere spectators. Artistic endeavour and perfumed vice mingle in a complete fraternity unknown elsewhere; everything is unusual, irregular, fantastic. Dayne emerges from the ordeal of this environment but little changed. For him the enticements of the flesh are not more powerful than those of art. One week he is beguiling the hours in some salon or alcove, the next he is incandescent with aspiration.

So the years pass; and at last, having saturated himself with the French theories of literary and graphic art which are bound up with the names of Flaubert, the de Goncourts, Zola, Degas, and Manet, he one day learns with tragic certainty that he is not destined to be a painter, and he courageously admits that all this periodic, frenzied effort has been misdirected. Then we have interludes of philosophy and literary criticism; the philosophy perhaps not of much account; the criticism often crude, hasty, and shallow, but original, epigrammatic, sometimes of an astounding penetration, and always *literary*—remarkable enough at a period when Englishmen had apparently lost the purely literary point of view.

Later, Dayne is driven by adverse circumstances to London and to a lodging in the Strand. He gives himself seriously to literature, and now we have incidents which beyond doubt are taken from life. That "The Magazine" must be Tinsley's is patent to everyone familiar with the Grub Street of the eighties; and in the tall man whom Mr Tinsley accepted for a second Dickens it is not difficult to recognise a novelist who, though he seems to

write no longer, has accomplished at least one excellent story. The book ends on a curiously wistful note, and we leave the hero, who has dipped into and withdrawn from the luxurious Bohemianism of London, at work on a novel.

The general tendency of Dayne's ideas about art and the cast of his temperament may be gathered from such characteristic passages as the following:

For art was not for us then as it is now—a mere emotion, *right or wrong only in proportion to its intensity*; we believed then in the grammar of art, perspective, anatomy, and *la jambe qui porte*.

In contemporary English fiction I marvel, and I am repeatedly struck by (*sic*) the inability of writers, even of the first class, to make an organic whole of their stories. Here, I say, the course is clear, the way is obvious, but no sooner do we enter on the last chapters than the story [Mr Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd*] begins to show incipient shiftiness, and soon it doubles back and turns, growing with every turn weaker like a hare before the hounds. From a certain directness of construction, from the simple means by which Oak's ruin is accomplished in the opening chapters, I did not expect that the story would run hare-hearted in its close, but the moment Troy told his wife that he never cared for her I suspected something was wrong; when he went down to bathe and was carried out by the current I knew the game was up, and was prepared for anything, even to the final shooting of the rich farmer and the marriage with Oak, a conclusion

which, of course, does not come within the range of literary criticism.

The Story of an African Farm was pressed upon me. I found it sincere and youthful, disjointed but well written; descriptions of sandhills and ostriches sandwiched with doubts concerning a future state and convictions regarding the moral and physical superiority of women: but of art nothing; that is to say, art as I understand it, rhythmical sequence of events described with rhythmical sequence of phrase.

For it (*Les Palais Nomades*) is in the first place free from those pests and parasites of artistic work—ideas. Of all literary qualities the creation of ideas is the most fugitive. . . .

But in me the impulse is so original to frequent the haunts of men that it is irresistible, conversation is the breath of my nostrils. I watch the movement of life, and my ideas spring from it uncalled for, as buds from branches. Contact with the world is in me the generating force; without it what invention I have is thin and sterile, and it grows thinner rapidly, until it dies away utterly.

Although Mr Moore had issued four novels, three of these being works of the first importance, before the appearance of the *Confessions*, the latter is probably a youthful work. At any rate it represents an early stage of the author's development. For our guidance in following the subsequent progress of his ideas, Mr Moore has thoughtfully introduced into nearly all his novels a novelist named Harding,

a character whom his creator eyes with unmistakable complacency. Harding holds advanced views on most things, and he is intimate with one Thompson, the leader of a school of painters styled "The Moderns," whose theories Harding endeavours to realise in literature. Whenever Harding appears the dialogue turns upon literature and art, and his remarks thereupon are full of interesting suggestion. In *A Modern Lover*, for example, he is made to state his position clearly, thus:

> We do not always choose what you call unpleasant subjects, but we try to go to the roots of things; and the basis of life, being material and not spiritual, the analyst invariably finds himself, sooner or later, handling what this sentimental age calls coarse. But, like Thompson, I am sick of the discussion. If your stomach will not stand the crudities of the moral dissecting-room, read verse; but don't try to distort an art into something it is not, and cannot be. *The Novel, if it be anything, is contemporary history, an exact and complete reproduction of social surroundings of the age we live in.*

But the most notable and dignified utterance upon the function of the novel is made by the author himself in *A Drama in Muslin*:

> Seen from afar all things in nature are of equal worth; and the meanest things, when viewed with the eyes of God, are raised to heights of tragic awe which conventionality

would limit to the deaths of kings or patriots. The history of a nation as often lies hidden in social wrongs and domestic griefs as in the story of revolution, and if it be for the historian to narrate the one, it is for the novelist to dissect and explain the other.

Here indeed is the voice of one who sees in the novel something more than diversion for weary brains.

II

After two small volumes of verse, *Flowers of Passion* and *Pagan Poems*, of which nothing need be said except that they contain some experiments in irregular rhythms more curious than successful, Mr Moore published his first novel, *A Modern Lover*, in 1883.

This is the story of a painter who prospered and flourished, not from innate ability of force of character, but solely by reason of the magnetic, persuasive, physical influence which he unconsciously exerted upon his fellow-creatures —and in particular upon those of them who happened to be women. Men despised him for his femininity, but they served towards his advancement: women adored him. Had he been an actor in New York he would have been styled "the matinée girls' idol." "He

was one of those creatures," said Harding to a group of "the Moderns," "who exercise a strange power over all with whom they come in contact, a control that is purely physical, yet acting equally on the most spiritual as on the most gross natures, and leading us independently of our judgment. How can we blame the women for going mad after him, when even we used to sacrifice ourselves, over and over again, to help him." He had "exquisite beauty, his feminine grace seemed like a relic of ancient Greece saved by some miracle through the wreck and ruin of ages. He leaned against an oak bureau, placed under a high narrow window, and the pose defined his too developed hips, always, in a man, the sign of a weak and lascivious nature."

The career of Lewis Seymour is disposed with a certain large simplicity round the figures of three women, each of whom abased herself that he might rise, and each of whom was cast behind him when her usefulness had ceased. At the beginning we find him, a starving art-student, lacking even the means to engage the model necessary for the execution of a very remunerative commission which chance has brought to him. In the same mean lodging-

house lives a work-girl, Gwynnie Lloyd, modest, pure, and warm-hearted, with whom he has relations of sentiment. A model is essential; but he has no money; he makes a suggestion to Gwynnie, and after a fierce conflict with her instincts she accepts the ignominious misery of sitting to him for the nude. The commission is carried out, to the great worldly advantage of Lewis, and Gwynnie is forgotten; for him she no longer exists.

The second woman is Mrs Bentham, rich, and living apart from an impossible husband. Lewis is invited to her country house in order that he may decorate the ball-room, and from the inception of their acquaintance, she scarcely hides from him the influence of his spell; nevertheless it is a long while before she becomes his mistress. They meet in Paris, where Lewis is studying, and the emotional climax of the book is reached upon an evening which the lovers spend together driving about the city. No other English writer has expressed the peculiar enchantment of Paris as Mr Moore does in this sensuous and glowing scene. It is a beautiful summer night:

Drawing up close to her in the captivating ease of the victoria, he endeavoured to attune his conversation to the

spirit of the hour. And what a delightful hour it was! The tepid air was as soft and luxurious as silk on their faces, and the swing of the swiftly-rolling carriage treacherously rocked to quietude all uneasy thoughts. . . . The victoria was now passing through the wide and mournful Place Vendôme into the brilliantly lighted Rue de la Paix. Upon a vast plain of moonlight blue sky was stretched the façade of the opera house; with its rich perspectives extending down the shadow-filled Rue Auber and Meyerbeer. On each side and atop of the highest roofs two gold figures spread their gold wings, whilst below in the blanching glow of clustering electric lights, the passers went like an endless procession of marionettes marching to the imagined strain of an invisible orchestra. . . .

The beauty of the city acted on Mrs Bentham and Lewis as a narcotic; and, in spirit, they had already stepped into the pleasures which Paris, in her capacity of fashionable courtesan, holds open to all comers. The measure of expectant waltzes beat in their feet, the fumes of uncorked champagne arose to their heads, and the light wings of unkissed kisses had already touched their lips, and their thoughts and bodies swayed by the motion of the carriage, watched deliciously the flashing and gleaming of the thousand lights that moved around them, seeing nothing distinctly but the round back of the coachman as he sat, his shoulders set, steering faultlessly through an almost inextricable mass of whirling wheels.

At a late hour they drive out to the Arc de Triomphe, and when the *détour* had been accomplished:

They descended the avenue towards Paris. The

chaplets of light that glowed through the leaves of the chestnut trees were now all extinguished; but Paris blazed at the bottom of the great white road. Far away by the Place de la Concorde, the terraces of the Orangerie—the dark running Seine with its bridges and beautiful buildings, lay extended like a lover-awaiting courtesan, and Mrs Bentham watched the city beaming distinct as they descended the long incline. Chameleon-like it changed every hour, now it appeared in her eyes like an infamous alcove full of shames and ignominies into which she was being dragged; she would fain have shut out the sight with her hands, she longed to fly from it; but she was whirled in a current she could not combat, and wearily she wished to sink to sleep, and then to awake to find that all was over, that all had been decided for her.

At last, after midnight, they reach the door of Mrs Bentham's hotel. Lewis wishes to enter. She begs him to go away, and complains that the *concierge* will be coming out to reconnoitre:

The moment was a critical one. There was no time for further words. Mrs Bentham pushed past him; but determined not to be beaten he followed her. *It was the bravest act of his life.*

In that last sentence we have a specimen of the ferocious humour Mr Moore has permitted himself about a dozen times in as many years.

This amour has rather a long existence, for all the resources of Mrs Bentham's wealth and

position are lavished upon Lewis. She even spends a thousand a year in secretly buying his pictures through a dealer. And so Lewis grows independent. He patronises the author of his successes, and laments in privacy that the hand of time is laid upon her. The end comes when Lewis meets Lady Helen, a daughter of a distinguished peer, and falls passionately, genuinely in love for the first time in his life. He instantly abandons Mrs Bentham; while she, for her part, recognising that his future prosperity must depend upon an advantageous marriage, sorrowfully yields him to the third woman, and is content thereafter to watch over his interests with a solicitude which is only maternal.

The third woman was decorative, and it was the painter in Lewis that she entranced:

> The light filled Lady Helen's saffron-coloured hair with strange flames, and the red poppies in her straw hat echoed, in a higher key, the flowers embroidered on her dress. She was quite five feet seven, and very slender. She was the type of all that is elegant, but in her elegance there was a certain hardness; her face seemed to have been squeezed between two doors. Lady Helen was very pale, and in the immaculate whiteness of her skin there was scarcely a trace of colour; it was pure as the white of an egg, only around the clear eyes it darkened to the liquid

velvety tint which announces a passionate nature. The head, beautifully placed on a long, thin neck, fell into ever-varying attitudes; the waist, which you could span with your hands, swayed deliciously, and the slight hips recalled more those of Bacchus than the Venus de Milo.

Lady Helen more than returns the fervency of Lewis, and in spite of terrible difficulties with her relatives (all of whom are drawn with remarkable skill—the mother is a superb sketch) she becomes his wife. Lewis is married in "a church filled with women he has deceived." His star continues to ascend. By degrees he grows weary of his once adored wife; and she, discovering in him a being more selfish than herself, bows to his egotism and becomes a slave. She closes her eyes to his peccadilloes; she uses the fascination of her individuality in order to obtain orders for portraits; she relaxes the exclusiveness of her drawing-room to the end that Lewis may become an A.R.A. And Lewis amuses himself, always extending the long record of his facile conquests.

He remained ever the same. He was now three-and-thirty, but he did not look more than six-and-twenty, and he grew daily more delightful and seductive. Experience and necessity had perfected the social talents with which nature had endowed him. Better than ever he knew how to interest, how to move. He knew the words that touched,

the words that caressed, the words that tickled; and, smiling and graceful, he continued to persuade ladies to sit for their portraits.

No discerning student could read *A Modern Lover* in 1883 without being impressed by the profound difference between it and all previous English novels. It was candidly erotic; it depressed; it presented a group of principal characters so unsavoury that one cannot possibly respect any of them; it scorned to be either bright or breezy or wholesome or anything that might secure the approbation of a great and enlightened public. But the quality which isolates it is deeper than these. It is written throughout with that religious, punctilious regard for major and minor truth which entitles it to be called "realistic." It was the first realistic novel in England. By the term "realistic novel" I simply mean, of course, one whose aim is to be *real*, regardless of any conventions which would involve a divergence from life itself. And I do not forget that the realism of one age is the conventionality of the next. In the main the tendency of art is always to reduce and simplify its conventions, thus necessitating an increase of virtuosity in order to obtain the same effects of shapeliness and

rhythm. But so far as we are concerned, Mr Moore achieved realism. Steeped in the artistic theories of modern France, he contrasted the grave and scientific fiction of Flaubert and his followers with the novels of Englishmen, and he saw in the latter, by comparison, only so many fairy tales devised for the pleasure of people who would not take art seriously. (For not even the finest English novelists had attempted to reproduce life in its entirety; the notion of doing so possibly never occurred to them.) He sought to do in English the thing which he had seen done in French. Casting away every consideration of usage, precedent, "propriety," popular taste, and impelled only by the desire to render with absolute fidelity life as he observed it, he wrote *A Modern Lover*. And though the ideas which urged him forward were already trite in France, they were startlingly new in this country. Thanks to the insularity of our island, he was indeed a pioneer. Like most pioneers, he was earnest almost to truculence. Knowing that sexuality was anathema, he chose a theme accordingly, and developed it in detail with an air sublimely unconscious of the frightful outrage he was inflicting. During the greater part of it *A*

Modern Lover is purely sexual—as sexual as Guy de Maupassant's *Bel Ami*, to which it bears a remarkable resemblance; indeed one could be certain that *A Modern Lover* was directly inspired by *Bel Ami* were it not for the fact that it preceded *Bel Ami* by two years.

We may imagine the horror and consternation which the book, suddenly cast like a bombshell into the midst of a sleepy hamlet, would create. We can perhaps sympathise with those who saw in it an infamy, a wanton and incredible provocation. Mr Moore had prepared a shock which was almost too severe: since that time many events have occurred, and we are now less easily roused to the anger of grieved righteousness. Yet *A Modern Lover* has not a trace of pornography. Considering the opportunities for indelicacy, its delicacy is really marvellous, much beyond what any public could with reason expect from such a revolutionary. It would appear that the author, having satisfied spleen in the selection of a subject, was content not to carry his theories to their last limits. The book is not realistic in the common meaning of the term. For the average person, a realistic novel is one which gives an unadorned recital of facts mainly

sordid and disgusting. *A Modern Lover* is full of poetic quality. Combined with and superimposed upon its cold exactitude, is that wide and absolute *vision* which, in verse as in prose, marks the loftiest form of art. It abounds with descriptions of urban and rural landscapes, of skies, and of passions, conceived and executed on the high plane of pure poetry. No richer, more glowing pictures of sunset can be found anywhere. The baser passions — those, for instance, of jealousy and of love which is not spiritual—are made grand by simple strength of imagination. One notes everywhere, also, the author's peculiar skill (the skill of a poet) in setting down a complex effect in one phrase. Thus, when Lewis, a starving and resourceless student, exasperated by the opulent luxury and dissipation around him, is walking one night through the West End, we read: *In his madness he fancied he heard the shower of gold and kisses that fell over the city.*

The psychology of the book is not less remarkable than its imagination. At each crisis in the development of the story the secret springs of human nature are exposed with the strict justice of a creator who regards his characters with divine indifference. Only some-

times does his icy impartiality give way to an attitude slightly sympathetic. The most effective example of such compassion is the scene of the ball where Mrs Bentham, who has made the two tragic discoveries that she is old and that Lewis has withdrawn his affection, is presented to us in a light so touching that we almost love this frail, demoralised and self-ruined woman. All the characters except Gwynnie Lloyd and such minor persons as Thompson the artist and Harding the novelist, are either depraved or contemptible or ridiculous—and chiefly they are depraved. Their author, violently opposed to the practice of those novelists and painters who gain from subject an effectiveness which he preferred to get by treatment, had evidently determined to owe nothing to the mere intrinsic charm of his people. He was amazingly serious and conscientious. But he could not rid himself completely of the English tradition, for towards the end of the book, in making Gwynnie Lloyd the maid of Lady Helen, he is guilty of a scandalous sentimentality. The defection from his ideal is so gross and so unconscious as to be laughable. The last part of the tale is in several respects the least fine. After

the honeymoon of Lewis and Lady Helen the theme is changed from love to art, the unity of the book is endangered, and the author scarcely escapes an anti-climax.

III

I have considered *A Modern Lover* at some length, not only because it is an extremely remarkable first novel, but also because it so plainly differentiates the aims and methods of Mr Moore from those of his contemporaries. Compared with his next work, however, it is faulty and insignificant. For *A Modern Lover* has the flaws of youthfulness. Its outlook, though penetrating, is narrow: love, jealousy, and colour—the author has eyes for nothing else. Moreover it is languorous, often effeminate; persuasive rather than compelling; and once or twice somewhat rank in its luxuriance. *A Mummer's Wife* has none of these imperfections.

This second novel (1885) suffered the same fate as its predecessor at the hands of the libraries. It could not have been so distasteful to Mrs Grundy, but it contained one scene of offence—a scene which Mr Moore quotes in full

in the pamphlet *Literature at Nurse.* Published to-day, the scene would arouse scarcely a comment, and one speculates in vain upon Mr Moore's reason for omitting it from later editions of the book.

In *A Mummer's Wife* the author logically prosecuted his theory of fiction, using a finer austerity, a severer self-discipline. *A Modern Lover* was adolescent. *A Mummer's Wife* is absolutely mature. The tale is that of the wife of a small draper in the North Staffordshire Potteries—an inexorable record of decadence. Mr Ede is asthmatical, and the story opens with one of his dreadful attacks. Kate Ede is passing her nights at her querulous husband's bedside, and her days in attending to the shop and her own dressmaking business. The household, which is completed by the figure of Ede's grim fanatic mother, is strictly religious, mean and sordid in its comforts, tedious and confined in the regularity of its movement. Kate's monotonous life, to quote Mr Moore's own summary, "flows on unrelieved by hope, love, or despair." To make a few extra shillings a week the Edes let their front rooms, which are taken by Mr Dick Lennox, the manager of an opera bouffe com-

pany on tour. He makes love to the draper's wife, seduces her (here occurred the eliminated scene), and she elopes with him. She travels about with the actors, and gradually becomes one of them; she "walks on" among the chorus, speaks a few words, says a few verses, and is eventually developed into a heroine of comic opera. This life, therefore, that up to twenty-seven knew no diversion, no change of thought or place, now knows neither rest nor peace. Even marriage, for Dick Lennox marries her when Ralph Ede obtains his divorce, is unable to calm the excitation of the brain that so radical a change of life has produced, and after the birth of her baby Kate takes to drink, sinks lower and lower, until death from dropsy and liver complaint saves her from becoming one of the street-walkers with whom she is in the habit of associating.

Here was a second, a stronger, and a still more dignified protest against the long-accepted methods of English novelists: a superb and successful effort to show that from life at its meanest and least decorative could be drawn material grand enough for great fiction. Mr Moore in this book ascetically deprived himself of all those specious aids to effect—nobility

of character, feminine grace, the sudden stroke of adverse fate, lovely scenic background, splendour of mere event—which the most gifted of his forerunners had found useful. His persons are in all respects everyday folk, lacking any sort of special individual charm, and at best full of paltry human faults. For scene he chooses one of the most unsightly towns in the kingdom, and the hero and heroine leave this only to wander through the frowsy theatres and theatrical lodging-houses of the north. He invents no tragic situations of conventional type. No one is much ill-used; even the wronged invalid husband recovers and marries again. There is no departure from daily existence at its most usual, no point at which we can say: "This was contrived for effect."

And, in practising such a unique austerity, George Moore produced a masterpiece. By the singleness of his purpose to be truthful, and by sheer power of poetical imagination, he has raised upon a sordid and repellent theme an epic tale, beautiful with the terrible beauty which hides itself in the ugliness of life. *A Mummer's Wife* is more than a masterpiece; it is one of the supreme novels of the century, a work which stands out, original, daring, severe, ruth-

less, and resplendent, even amongst the finest. It excels at all points. In the large masses of its form it is impeccable. It proceeds naturally and inevitably, without haste and without slur to a catastrophe from which there is no escape. The characters have the illusion of beings seen and known. In the matter of detail the book stands solitary in modern English fiction. Never before was the laborious scholarship of "local colour" used with such ease and skill. Mr Moore is at home everywhere: in the little draper's shop of an obscure town; under the stages of provincial theatres; in the dressing-rooms of loose coryphées; in earthenware manufactories; in the purlieus of Islington. He knows the trivial routine of a dressmaking business, and how a comic opera is rehearsed. He can tell you the precise attitude of the working woman towards her fiction. He knows how a child is born and how it dies. He is acquainted with the minute phenomena of inebriety and of organic disease. He writes of nothing which he has not observed — but he has observed everything. In the hands of a lesser artist such prodigious lore might have resulted in an orgy of fact; in the hands of George Moore its effect is merely to give the

reader a sense of security and confidence amid the tumult of imagination.

There is one charge to be laid against *A Mummer's Wife*, and it touches the question of style. George Moore's style presents a most curious literary problem. In the writing, not only of *A Mummer's Wife*, but of all his novels, the finest qualities and the meanest defects are mingled so curiously that one dares neither to bestow upon nor to withhold from him the title of stylist. From the outset his prose was interesting. The prose of *A Modern Lover* might be described by those two favourite adjectives of the author's own, "languorous" and "persuasive." It has an indolent voluptuous beauty which only seldom approaches the lyricism of great prose. It is, however, frequently emotional, and the best parts of the book are those dealing with passion and the excitations of nature. It is often vehement, scarcely once virile. *A Mummer's Wife* shows a development. Here the style is virile and generous. Take the admirable description of Dick Lennox:

> She yearned to bury her poor aching body, throbbing with the anguish of nerves, in that peaceful hulk of fat, so calm, so grand, so invulnerable to pain, marching amid,

and contented in, its sensualities, as a stately bull grazing amid the pastures of a succulent meadow.

The word "succulent" in this passage is chosen with the nicest intention to illustrate the character.

For an example of lofty lyricism, observe the whole scene in which Kate's baby dies while its parents are asleep. It includes thus:

Above the dark roof the moon had now become a crescent, and as an angel stealing and leaning forward, a white ray kissed with cold supernatural kisses the cheeks of the lonely child,—and instantly, as if in fear, the blue staring eyes were opened, the little legs were drawn up to the very chest, the weak wail ceased and the convulsions began. Would father or mother awake to soothe the pitiful struggle? No, the shivering little limbs stirred only to the hideous accompaniment of the drunken woman's snores; and even as heedless, majestic in naked golden glory, the moon swam up through the azure peace of the skies, until brought face to face with the child.

Then, in a strange and luminous pause, a green presence took possession of the whole room, including every detail in its mysterious embrace. The meanest objects became weird and fearsome; form and sound were transfigured. Demon-like, the brandy bottle stood on the chest of drawers, and the huddled group in the dusky bed seemed as a vile world snoring, equally indifferent to life and to death. Yet for a moment there was hope, for, as if subdued by the magnetism of an unearthly power, the convulsions grew less, and a sweet calm came over the cradle. The respite, how

brief it was! Soon the little blankets were cast aside, the legs were twisted on to the chest, and the eyes blinked convulsively. But no smile of joy, nor tear of grief, changed the mild cruelty of the amber-coloured witch at the window: softly as a drinking snake, she drank of this young life. Thou shalt be mine and mine only, she seemed to say; and in the devouring gleams the struggle was continued. Out of the flower-like skin black stains grew; all the soft roundnesses fell into distortions; chubby knees were wrenched to and fro, muscles seemed to be torn, and the bones beneath to be broken violently: as in the Laocoon, every movement spoke of pain.

So, for an inappreciable space of time, the white rays glorified the poetic agony; and then the little wan body lay still in a flood of passionless light. Not a star watched the bird-like remains: only the moon knew of the moon's tragedy; and after lingering an hour, the pale aureole moved up the sky, leaving the child to sleep in darkness for ever.

It would be difficult in the face of such prose to deny to the author most of the qualities which make for distinguished style: dignity, a rhythmical sense, a true feeling for words, and that delight in words *qua* words so characteristic of all modern stylists. Yet, an examination of his defects will give us pause. For all Mr Moore's books are studded with passages that disclose stone-blindness to the niceties of diction and punctuation, an ignorance of common rules, of composition and even of grammar, indiscretions

in the use of metaphor, and a general lack of literary good taste. Scores of examples might be selected, but I must be content with a few:

They seemed like a *piece* of finished sculpture ready to be taken from the *peace* and meditation of the studio and placed in the noise and staring of the gallery.

She could not help but feeling ashamed.

A vision of Mrs Bentham seated at supper by his side *rose to his lips.*

Mr Carver only eyed him sharply and advised him to be very careful, to look before he leaped, *and,* better still, *not to leap at all,* but to *let things untie themselves* gradually.

Esther asked him after Mrs Randal and her children (meaning, not that Esther asked Mrs Randal and her children first and *him* afterwards, but that she inquired from him concerning Mrs Randal and her children).

Re-see, re-finish, disassociate, ennuied.

One is accustomed to meet such solecisms only in prose which is absolutely worthless. But Mr Moore plants them in the very midst of passages otherwise noble and dignified. The faults may be superficial, but they effectually tarnish. Only a man who, having developed in another art the higher qualities of the artist, had turned suddenly to literature without troubling to acquire the rudiments of its technique, could possibly have committed them.

IV

In the fifteen years which have elapsed since *A Mummer's Wife*, Mr Moore has published six novels, including the book which gave him popularity. None of these, in my opinion, quite equals *A Mummer's Wife*. Even *Esther Waters* is colder, less richly inspired. Of the rest, one, *Vain Fortune*, is slight, obviously a minor work; and it seems to be Mr Moore's desire that two others, *Spring Days* and *Mike Fletcher*, should be forgotten. As to *Esther Waters*, and *Evelyn Innes* and its sequel, it is unnecessary to say anything; the first has been definitely accepted as a masterpiece, and the others are at present in the eye of the public. There remains, of the first importance, *A Drama in Muslin*.

This novel, issued a year after *A Mummer's Wife*, is very different thematically from either of its predecessors. In it Mr Moore deals with what is called "the marriage market." He has five heroines, all more or less of good birth, and he exposes the wild, breathless husband-hunt in its every aspect — sordid, strategic, crafty, base, sometimes almost epic. To accentuate the despicable meanness of this

scramble for establishment and position, the scene is laid chiefly in provincial Ireland, with Dublin as the centre of all things, and a Viceroy's kiss as the climax of social distinction. The terrible triviality of it is emphasised by basing it on a subsoil, as it were, of the revolt of the Irish peasants, the fatal machinations of the League. This under-theme is used sparingly; just a glimpse opens here and there to hint that all the artificialities which make husband-hunting possible, are tottering over a seismic disturbance of elemental things. Judge of the effect of a passage such as the following in the midst of the illusions of drawing-rooms:

> And now they saw that which they had taken to be eternal, vanishing from them even as a vapour. An entire race, a whole caste, saw themselves driven out of their soft, warm couches of idleness, and forced into the struggle for life. The prospect appalled them; birds with shorn wings could not gaze more helplessly on the high trees where they had built, as they thought, their nests out of the reach of evil winds. What could they do with their empty brains? What could they do with their feeble hands? Like an avenging spirit, America rose above the horizon of their vision, and the plunge into its shadowy arms threatened, terrified them now, as it had terrified the famine-stricken peasants of Forty-nine.

And the tragic suggestiveness of such landscapes as this:

> Around them the barren country lay submerged in shadows; the ridge of the uplands melted into the drifting grey of the sky, and every moment the hearth-fire of a cabin started into or disappeared from sight. They burned, steadfast and solitary, in the dim wastes that stretched from hill to hill, or were seen in clusters between the dark-blowing foliage of the roadside poplars; and as the carriage passed, on a doorway full of yellow light the form of a man was often sketched in menacing black.

With its five heroines and involved complexity of intrigue, it is impossible here to discuss the enormous detail of *A Drama in Muslin.* I must be content to bring out, for the benefit of those who continually assert that only a single living novelist has mastered the feminine mind, one salient and indisputable fact concerning it: namely, that the book is a gallery of unsurpassed portraits of women. There are at least a dozen women in the book painted with absolute insight and fidelity. In particular, Mrs Barton and her two daughters Alice and Olive, triumphantly live. You cannot argue about them: they are as vital as yourself. In Alice Barton, the plain elder sister of the vapid beauty whom Mrs Barton is determined to marry to a

title, we have one of the very few "sympathetic" characters drawn by George Moore. Alice Barton is entirely lovable, full of sagacity and of "the grave and exquisite kindness of a beautiful soul." She will yield to none in sheer charm, and she is the good genius of the story. She alone can comfort the mystic Lady Cecilia whose loathing for men and the world amounts to a disease; she alone assists Mary Gould through her shameful motherhood; she alone can nurse the hysterical, beautiful Olive through an attack of fever; she alone comprehends the fineness of her father's twisted nature; she alone hates Lord Dungory. She is compact of sense and charity. And yet even she, while scorning the ignoble ideals which constitute husband-hunting the chief occupation of a girl's life, could not but tremble before the prospects of one who, brought up as girls were brought up, should fail in that grand campaign.

For her there is nothing, nothing, nothing! Her life is weak and sterile, even as the plain of moonlight-stricken snow. Like it she will fade, will pass into a moist and sunless grave, without leaving a trace of herself on the earth—this beautiful earth, built out of and made lovely with love. Yes, built out of love—for all is love. Spring, with amorous

hands, will withdraw the chaste veil of winter's maidenhood, and the world, like a bride arrayed in flowers and expectation, will be but a universal shrine, wherein is worshipped the deity. All then shall be ministrants of love. Sweet winds shall join herb and flowers, and through the purple night soft-winged moths shall carry the desire of every plant and blossom; in the light air the wings of mating birds shall mingle, and upon the earth the lowliest animals be united; only woman is forbidden to obey the one universal instinct, coequal with the music of the spheres, and eternal even as it.

One is relieved from a painful apprehension when, towards the end of the story, Alice falls in love with the quiet, scholarly dispensary doctor, and, characteristically calm before her mother's angry denunciations, marries him.

A Drama in Muslin excels in character-drawing. Neither before nor since has Mr Moore analysed types with such various and perfect skill. In the lyric and dramatic qualities it is perhaps somewhat inferior to *A Modern Lover* and *A Mummer's Wife*; here and there are signs of fatigue. But it is far from being without that generous lyricism which is the blossom of prose literature; and the middle of the tale is moving drama. The figure of the poor hunted Marquis, wandering by night about Dublin, torn between his passion for Violet Scully and Mrs Barton's Napoleonic offer of

£20,000 with Olive, cannot be forgotten. The book is completely serious, rigidly veracious—a brilliant instance of the modern tendency to bring history, sociology and morals within the dominion of the novelist's art. Quite as much as *Esther Waters* it is didactic. It teaches, as all true art must. It is more than a story; it seeks to do something more than please. And this seriousness, this religious devotion to truth, this proud scorn of every prejudice which might limit his scope: these qualities, occurring as they do everywhere in Mr Moore's work, differentiate that work from that of almost all his contemporaries.

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